Ancient Identities in Britain

Exploring heritage in the making

Richard Hingley, Kate Sharpe and Thomas Yarrow

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Preface

The *Ancient Identities* project, from which this volume derives, ran from 2016 to 2021 and was a joint venture between Durham University (Anthropology and Archaeology), Edinburgh University and UCL. This project was fully funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council [grant number AH/N006151/1] under the title 'Iron Age and Roman Heritages: Exploring Ancient Identities in Modern Britain'.[1] The project outline was created by Richard Hingley, Chiara Bonacchi and Thomas Yarrow. Kate Sharpe was employed from 2016 to 2019 as the postdoctoral researcher for the project. The *Ancient Identities* project was split into two elements. Bonacchi's digital heritage research has already been fully published (Bonacchi 2022). This volume addresses the research undertaken in Durham.

The present monograph contains an assessment of Iron Age and Roman heritage venues, re-enactment groups and community projects conducted by Hingley (Part I) and additional information and interpretations derived from the ethnographic fieldwork conducted at several open-air museums by Sharpe (Part II). Our research focused primarily upon how ideas about the ancient past are tied into physical locations in the British landscape. Although this volume addresses the UK, the material explored in the chapters of the book has a broad international relevance, since influential new research is emerging on how the Iron Age and Roman pasts are received in other countries (Bonacchi 2022; C-Limes 2024; Garraffoni and Funari 2012; González-Álvarez and Alonso González 2013; Holtorf 2014; Rodríguez-Hernández and González-Álvarez 2020; Versluys 2024; Winkelmolen, Garidou and van Houtum 2024).

Note

1 https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FN006151%2F1.

1

Introduction: myths, dualities and the making of places

Richard Hingley, Thomas Yarrow and Kate Sharpe

Introduction

This volume focuses on perceptions and representations of the Iron Age and Roman past in Britain. We chose to focus on the Iron Age and Roman periods since the heritage of these two ancient periods is deeply intertwined (Hingley, Bonacchi and Sharpe 2018). Our empirical research, outlined in the subsequent chapters, highlights how these heritages are embedded (or implicated) in a range of social stances and identities. Fundamental to ideas that draw upon the Iron Age and Roman pasts is the manner in which these periods have been subjected to dualistic ideas. 'Insistent dualities' often characterise thoughts about the people inhabiting Britain in each single time period and also the relationship between pre-Roman and Roman (Beard and Henderson 1999; Hingley, Bonacchi and Sharpe 2018). This chapter outlines the origins of a number of these dualities and begins to analyse some inconsistencies and ambiguities that help to explain the influence of these myths. It also contains a brief review of previous works on the topic of the heritages drawn from the Iron Age and Roman past and a review of the concept of place-making that is drawn upon throughout this book. Finally, we outline the individual chapters and the methods used to collect and interpret the information included in our case studies.

Part I of this book explores the insistent dualities that dominate public presentations of the Iron Age and Roman pasts in Britain, focusing on why people might wish to draw upon ideas derived from these ancient pasts in certain ways and the roots of these ideas in terms of their concepts of origin. It follows the broadly critical perspective outlined in the critique of national origin myths (see Hingley 2000). Seeking to

establish some of the simple ways the past has been presented, it also explores attempts to provide more complex interpretations at ancient monuments and museums.

Some archaeologists, anthropologists and historians have taken a less openly critical approach in considering the power and significance of origin myths (Blain and Wallis 2007; Bradley 2010; Gazin-Schwartz and Holtorf 1999; Gibson, Trower and Tregidga 2013; Glazier 2007; Kaminski-Jones and Kaminski-Jones 2020; Parker 2009; Waddell 2015). Part II of this book takes inspiration from these studies to develop a broadly ethnographic approach, exploring a range of ideas about the Iron Age and Roman periods in Britain and how and why such ideas are deployed by contemporary actors. We explore how ideas about the ancient past are embedded in the lived realities of particular groups of people. We aim to understand why, how and to whom these ideas appeal and with what consequences. How are these pasts drawn upon in people's understandings of themselves and others? Rather than assessing their truth or accuracy, we are interested in various forms of truth that people recognise in their own tellings and imaginings of these histories.

Origin myths and archaeology

The periods of the pasts that form our focus provide rich sources of myth and meaning for people across Europe, including ideas about origins that have played significant roles in the emergence of modern nation states (Sommer 2017). Origin myths are ideas that draw upon claimed ancestors to identify the ancient roots of modern society, concepts that have been fundamental to the definition of the identities of people since the Renaissance (Brocklehurst and Phillips 2004; Miller 1995, 35–40; Samuel and Thompson 1990). During the nineteenth century, myths related to ancient peoples became central to the historical claims of European nations in the efforts made to unify their peoples (Sommer 2017, 166). The focus on the term 'myth' in accounts of such nationalist enterprises demonstrates that all accounts of the remains left behind by ancient peoples are, inevitably, subject to conjecture and fantasy (Hingley 2011, 620). It is the power of a myth as an imaginative reflection of the past in the present that provides its attraction to many people. The most long-running myths of ancient origins have drawn, at least to a degree, upon ancient texts and archaeological discoveries to support their claims. This does not mean that contemporary archaeologists always agree with the uses to which their materials are put.

The discipline of archaeology emerged during the nineteenth century in the context of debates about the racial origins of contemporary peoples, drawing upon classical texts and archaeological remains to identify Celtic, Germanic, Roman and Saxon populations (Manias 2013, 4). The founders of the discipline in Britain directed attention to establishing the rules and methods of the subject during the 1930s. This disciplinary process of ordering determined a succession of periods that characterised the past and, in the process, archaeologists aimed to undermine some long-established myths – for example, the belief that druids had worshipped at megaliths (Stout 2008). During the final two decades of the last century, attention turned to the decolonisation of archaeological theory and the concepts of Celtic, Roman and Anglo-Saxon origins all came under scrutiny. Influential accounts aimed to undermine the common assumption that people across the northern and western areas of Britain were directly descended from the ancient 'Celtic' inhabitants of these areas (Chapman 1992; James 1999; Sims-Williams 1986). The theory of Romanisation also came under attack for its imperial overtones, which linked ideas of spreading civilisation in the Roman and contemporary worlds (Mattingly 2006; Webster 1996). How much have these critiques impacted upon popular perceptions of the ancient past?

The Iron Age and Roman pasts

As an introduction to the influence of some of the ideas that derive from our twin periods of focus, we will see that Roman heritage has a greater prominence in England today, which is evident in several ways. The focus on the Roman military is exemplified by the complex infrastructure of Hadrian's Wall, which is one of Britain's best-known ancient monuments, and also by the prominence of the image of the legionary soldier in re-enactment. Some of the Roman towns and villas of southern Britain are well-known as heritage venues (The Roman Baths at Bath, Fishbourne Roman Palace, Chedworth Roman Villa, etc.) and displays that feature the Roman past are also common at our national and local museums. Media attention is often focused on the idea of the introduction of public order to Britain in the Roman past and the passing on of civilisation to people in the south of the UK as the result of the conquest of Britain. Discoveries of Roman mosaic floors and villas are frequently featured in the newspapers.

The Iron Age used to hold a very secondary position to the Roman period, although we shall see that many of the insistent dualities that

permeate our overall theme derive from the contrasts that are often drawn between the Iron Age and Roman pasts. One significant change since the 1970s has been the growing prominence of the Iron Age across Britain, which has formed the focus for many of the open-air museums (venues with reconstructed buildings) across the UK (Butser Ancient Farm, Castell Henllys, the Scottish Crannog Centre, etc.). The idea of Iron Age living has spread in popularity.

Stories derived from discoveries of Iron Age sites and finds often appeal to the media. For example, Nicola Davis, the science correspondent for *The Guardian*, reported in June 2021 that new research at the University of York analysing finds from the hillfort at Broxmouth (East Lothian) suggests that Iron Age people were emotionally attached to objects (Davis 2021). Commenting on this research, archaeologist Sarah Tarlow observed:

> It is a nice way of looking at later prehistory which is not about power and status and it is not about religion and cultural identity. It is about the emotional bonds between people, which is lovely … I think that helps us to imagine iron age people as three-dimensional, feeling people who had complicated relationships to each other … just in the same way we do. (Tarlow, in Davis 2021)

We shall see that a sustained focus over the past 50 years on the idea of living in the Iron Age has motivated the reconstruction of later prehistoric roundhouses at many venues. These places provide a very different conception of ancient living from that highlighted by the ancient monuments and museums that feature the Roman past. This idea of Iron Age life as communal, egalitarian and living within the constraints of the environment has origins in the writings of classical authors that drew upon the resistant 'barbarian' populations in pre-Roman Britain to provide a critique of the dictatorial rule of Rome by a succession of emperors. Archaeological research during the mid-twentieth century eroded an earlier conception of a barbaric, violent and unsettled Iron Age by uncovering information to indicate that communities lived in small settlements of roundhouses set within agricultural landscapes. Two key inspirations for this new narrative were the establishment of the 'Iron Age Village' at Butser (by Peter Reynolds) in 1972 and the broadcasting of the BBC TV programme, *Living in the Past*, in 1979.

We spend some time below considering why Iron Age and Roman heritages appeal to various individuals and constituencies. The Romans have value as a source of ideas about education, order and

luxurious living. Increasingly, ideas about the diversity of the Roman-period population have proliferated in museum displays and some media coverage. A key theme used to communicate the Roman past in education is the concept of 'What the Romans did for us', popularised by the much-quoted scene in Monty Python's *Life of Brian* (1979), reiterated in a popular BBC television programme first shown in 2000. Much of the education about the ancient past in English schools is focused on this theme (Hingley, Bonacchi and Sharpe 2018, 286–7).

In the face of developing concerns about the deteriorating environment, the idea of communal and sustainable Iron Age living has also become popular with some sections of the public and has come to play a significant role in school education to counteract the continuing focus on the Romans. This helps to explain why Iron Age roundhouse reconstructions are now common across Britain, and the concept of communal environmental living is spreading to the building of classrooms and even dwellings. It has led one architectural firm to suggest on their website that the idea of the roundhouse is 'rooting itself back into our civilisation' (Rotunda 2022a). The major engineering works and substantial industrial activities undertaken in Britain in Roman times may have had an impact on the popularity of this period.

Initially, in our exploration of insistent dualities, we shall consider teaching materials that introduce children in the UK to the Iron Age and Roman pasts. These play a role in the ideas that people hold about the ancient past. The education resources explored below are important since the focus in our case studies in Parts I and II of this book is upon how heritage venues cater for school education and where the ideas held by the public about the Iron Age and Roman period may have originated. These resources illustrate how specific linear narratives about the ancient past are communicated as knowledge of the origins of the peoples of Britain. The teleological content of these teaching resources will be familiar to those living in many other countries where the Romans have been (and are) viewed as bringers of 'civilisation' and/or violent military oppressors (cf. Hingley 2001; Terrenato 2019, 14–17).

Educational materials and insistent dualities

It is through school education that most people gain their idea of the ancient past. All four countries that make up the UK have their own educational curricula, which we will not discuss in detail here (cf. Hingley, Bonacchi and Sharpe 2018). A key factor in the school

educational curriculum is the free online material supplied by the BBC to teachers and school pupils across the UK (BBC 2024a). These educational materials provide an insight into the narratives of national origins on which many people draw for their knowledge of the ancient past. The BBC regularly updates these web resources and involves specialists in developing them. Still, they serve to communicate teleological perspectives on national origins.

The BBC website 'Bitesize' is used to support teaching at schools across Britain. Alongside guidance for Maths, English and Science, materials are provided for History teaching at Key Stage 2 (7–11 years of age), which includes information on the different periods of the historic past. The section of Bitesize on Roman Britain has eight educational guides that provide some informed discussion. The classroom videos include: 'How the "Caledonians" fought back against the Roman invaders', 'Life as a Roman legionary', 'Visiting a Roman town', 'A tour of a Roman villa', 'The nature of technology that the Romans brought to Britain' and 'How the Romans left their mark upon Britain' (BBC 2024a). One video is titled 'What did the Romans do for us' and a caption explains:

> Just how much of today's Britain has been influenced by the Romans? Many of our buildings and how they are heated, the way we get rid of our sewage, the roads we use, some of our wild animals, religion, the words and language we speak, how we calculate distances, numbers and why we use money to pay for goods were all introduced by the Romans.

These well-designed and attractive teaching resources emphasise that 'the Romans' lived in a relatively orderly and settled world, with law, education, literature, theatre, sport, taxes and distinct class and gender divisions and that the people in Britain were high-class Romans with their well-dressed ladies. Towns, baths and villas have a high profile in these materials and the slaughter and enslavement of enemies of the empire are passed over. The BBC provides other teaching materials, often drawing upon recent research, including an animation on 'Life in Roman Britain' for Key Stage 2 pupils (BBC 2024b). This animation, first produced in 2014, caused a storm on Twitter (now X) a few years ago by portraying a dark-skinned provincial governor of Britain and his family (Beard 2016).

The educational agenda behind the focus of attention on the Romans in the Bitesize teaching materials draws very deeply upon a

highly influential BBC series and accompanying book, *What the Romans Did for Us* (Wilkinson 2000). This resource has been used for well over two decades as a teaching aid for children (Hingley 2015, 168). In addition to the material provided by the BBC, a range of school teaching resources available on the internet, both free and at a charge, address questions such as: 'What the Romans did for us', 'What have the Romans ever done for us' and an assortment of similar themes.[1]

By exploring the innovations and inventions that the Romans are claimed to have introduced to Britain – the cities, roads, villas, new species, industries and order – most of these teaching resources, like the BBC programme and accompanying book, emphasise the idea of a continuity of national history in which the Romans introduced 'civilisation' to southern Britain, with legionaries protecting the frontiers in Wales and northern England. The Romans then lost their power during the early fifth century and abandoned Britons to what is often called the 'Dark Ages'.

The Iron Age peoples described for children by the BBC on Bitesize seem, by contrast, somewhat 'other', living in 'tribal' kingdoms with no urban centres. They are creators of roundhouses and hillforts, who pass down oral traditions and are subjected to armed invasions before, across England at least, being defeated and incorporated into the Roman empire (BBC 2024a). These teaching resources are more limited than those for Roman Britain, but include information for Key Stage 2 pupils on 'How did Iron Age people live?' A few years ago, Bitesize explained that: 'Iron Age Britain was a violent place [where] … rival tribes fought with deadly iron weapons. Many people lived in hillforts to keep safe from attack'. The updated material pays far less attention to violence and disorder, explaining that the Iron Age Britons followed 'a Celtic way of life', producing fine metalwork and 'enjoying feasting, music and poetry'. Therefore, the BBC's interpretation of the Iron Age has been updated by downplaying disorder and strife.

The former focus on Iron Age violence and warring projected the idea that, by invading, the Romans performed a favour for the population of southern Britain, ending the regular internal conflict (Nagre 2023, 16–18). This was seen to have enabled Iron Age villagers to learn the benefits of peace and to establish themselves in villas and urban centres. Even when the Iron Age is viewed as less overtly violent, as in the recent BBC materials, the Romans are still considered positive due to the innovations they (supposedly) introduced to Britain. This positive narrative directly replicates the agenda behind 'What the Romans did for us' and sidelines issues that teachers might find hard to explore

with younger pupils. These issues include the devastation caused by the Roman invasion, the continuous state of conflict on the northern frontier of Britannia, the enslavement of thousands of Britons during the Roman invasion and later campaigns on the frontier, the proliferation of prostitution among the military communities of the frontier, the hierarchical and phallocentric character of Roman society and the dictatorial rule of the Roman emperors. Although it is entirely understandable that these themes are not considered appropriate by teachers for Key Stage 2 pupils, this approach to the past also perpetuates the nostalgic linking of the Roman and British empires (Nagre 2023, 16–18).

It is important to emphasise the teleology of the view of 'What the Romans did for us'. It reads 'our' own 'achievements', whether framed as 'civilisation', 'empire', or ideas about technological advancement as legacies of this Roman past. And, turning this observation the other way around, it also invokes that past as evidence of these qualities in the present. The way that the Roman and Iron Age pasts are imagined have tended to be inflected by a broader oppositional logic, manifested in various ways at least as far back as the Enlightenment. This defines a duality between an idea of our own (whether British or more generally Western) exceptionalism as enlightened, civilised, developed, cultured people, distanced from and in control of nature; alongside a Romantic celebration (in opposition to this) of the 'natural', wild, uncultivated, spiritual and irrational (Bradley 2010; Morse 2005). The idea of the wild and uncultivated Iron Age has been modified by the campaign of building roundhouses since the 1970s, with a new focus upon a domesticated and settled past; but the Romans are still seen to have been modernisers.

This review of school educational material supports the contention that concepts of the Iron Age and Roman pasts are often defined against each other in the form of oppositions (Hingley and Unwin 2005, 205–21). The Iron Age is sometimes interpreted as a time of warring 'tribes', although the ways this period are presented at heritage venues and museums over the past 50 years has increasingly emphasised the idea of egalitarian, localised and spiritual communities with relatively little evidence for population movement (Chapter 3). The latest materials for the Iron Age on BBC Bitesize follow this more settled and less conflicted perspective. The evidence for female Iron Age warriors and leaders is sometimes used to challenge the idea of male domination as projected by the image of the 'Celtic warrior' and Roman legionary (Chapter 4).

The Roman period, by contrast, is often seen as relatively settled and civilised (once the armed opposition had been put down), dominated by the upper classes (emperors, Roman officers, legionary

soldiers and Roman ladies), ordered and paternalistic. It is also often conceived as a period in which the Mediterranean-based 'civilisation' of Rome introduced order (and Christianity) to Britain or (at least) to the southern part of the mainland. These oppositions represent only a few of the dualities that can be derived from Iron Age and Roman materials and concepts and, indeed, each period is characterised by a series of dualities in the way it is interpreted. For example, the Romans can be viewed by some people as military, colonial and exploitative, while others consider it to have been a relatively ordered and civilised time (Bonacchi 2022, 79–107). The Iron Age may be seen by some people as a time when people were spiritual, free-willed, capable farmers and craftspeople – while others consider that the civilising hand of Rome was required to tame these wild people.

At the start of the *Ancient Identities* project, we organised two workshops to discuss the prevalence and character of insistent dualities that characterise Iron Age and Roman heritages. This resulted in a list of oppositions that has helped to inform our research (Table 1.1). Comparable dualities have been documented by researchers in northern Spain (González-Álvarez and Alonso González 2013, 163). We also discussed the limitations of such oppositional thinking and some of this analysis is brought out in the case studies below.

Focusing on oppositions tends to drive a wedge between the two time periods addressed here, obscuring continuities and complex processes of transformation. Our intervention in the research reported in this volume, then, is to trace the contemporary ways in which these ideas are used and invoked – how a more long-term and enduring set

Table 1.1 Examples of the insistent dualities that characterise Iron Age and Roman heritages

Iron Age	Roman
indigenous	foreign
barbaric	civilised
spiritual	rational
insular	multicultural
wild	cultured
ignorant	educated
instinctive	controlled
rural	urban
agrarian	industrial/militarised
free	enslaved
traditional	progressive
dispersed	centralised
rooted	mobile

of ideas (and material residues) deriving from these periods are made use of in a particular contemporary moment contoured by particular concerns, anxieties and interests. Though these dualities are sociologically significant, we highlight how these ideas are embedded in contemporary social contexts in ways that complicate any straightforward opposition.

Challenging the authorised and the unauthorised in heritage discourse

Another of the insistent dualities explored in this book derives from the definition of the concept of 'authorised heritage discourse' in the writings of Laurajane Smith (2004), which has created an opposition between concepts of tangible heritages that are authorised and unofficial heritages, which are often intangible. Focusing on the critique of the claim to absolute knowledge in the field of heritage, Smith (2004, 3) addresses the degree to which the discipline of archaeology has maintained a discourse that stresses the position of the individual archaeologist as an expert and the nature of the discipline as a 'neutral and value-free practice'. She also observes that this situation continued in archaeology despite frequent 'post-modern incursions' into the discipline. Heritage practice in Europe and the West has tended, in the past, to downgrade the intangible in a prime focus upon 'elitist' tangible heritage that has been neatly separated off and removed from concepts of the present (Smith and Waterton 2012, 163).

Frank Hassard (2009, 279) has emphasised, in a discussion of intangible heritage across the UK, that the 'modern scientific understanding' of heritage 'wishes to accept the inheritance of culture in material form alone', while sidelining the 'cultural processes by way of which that inheritance has been formed and transmitted'. This idea of archaeology as a value-free discipline has been eroded in parts of the world, including North America and Australia, because of the conflicts between archaeologists and 'descendant communities' (Smith 2004, 3). Many such communities view the past quite differently and in ways that challenge archaeologists by laying claims to the deep contemporary relevance of tangible and intangible heritages (Atalay 2012; Cipolla and Haynes 2015).

The methods and theories of archaeology can be interpreted, therefore, as ways to make claims to the physical resources of the past, to emphasise professional status and to secure the incomes of practitioners

(Smith and Waterton 2009, 2). This comment seems somewhat unfair if applied to the UK today, considering the efforts of many archaeologists who have struggled to make a living in the declining economic conditions that have impacted most people over the past decades. Attention, however, is required to the rules that define the discipline of archaeology. Stout (2008, 4) has written of the 'process of professionalization that created [a] … position of disciplinary authority' for prehistoric archaeologists in Britain during the twentieth century. This process established norms for the archaeological profession that are often considered 'general "common sense"', ideas and positions that have been challenged since the 1980s but not entirely replaced (Smith and Waterton 2009, 3). Stout (2008, 165) argues that archaeological work on megaliths during the mid-twentieth century, for example, took 'the torch of enlightenment science through the romantic "mist" and "fog" … into the dark places of wild antiquarianism'. An important element in ordering, this approach made the past describable and presentable to the public.

The perspective, which distanced megalithic monuments from the Iron Age past and from the present, is often now viewed as having had a negative impact, articulating the idea of a neutral and value-free study of the past that operated in opposition to others who were (and are) labelled as unscholarly in their understandings (Blain and Wallis 2007, 36; cf. Hill 2008). Stout (2008, 6) observes that, by creating a 'disciplinary stockade', archaeologists have limited the utility of their subject. We shall see that this has impacted, for example, on the guidelines for community archaeology (Chapter 5).

The idea of a neutral and value-free archaeological position defines 'knowledge' of the past as existing in a context that is, effectively, 'out of time'. It suggests that social context and education have little or no role in the way 'facts' are collected within a (supposedly) neutral and value-free practice of archaeology. Many researchers use an intellectual approach to construct a conceptual barrier that separates the present from the materials that constitute the subject matter of their research. Based on a concept of linear time, this places past societies and their material residues in their correct chronological pigeonhole. The theoretical and methodological tools that archaeologists have developed to 'get at' the past remain deeply important to the discipline. They form part of the 'expert practices' created over the past century and a half, the result of specific interactions between people and things (cf. Jones and Yarrow 2013, 6).

Isolating the past, as the subject of study, from the present is a vital intellectual tool (Chapter 5) – although it has been widely acknowledged since the 1980s that the conception that the past and present are

separate is a positivistic abstraction. The act of delimitation on which this technique is based is often elaborated by archaeologists (and historians) through the creation of a sequential sense of temporal order, itself based on 'practices of synchronization' focused on chronology, that have given rise to 'homogeneous, linear and teleological time, often … simply referred to as progress' (Jordheim 2014, 498). The concept of sequence in archaeology places the subject of our scholarship in a distant position, apparently entirely separate from the world in which we undertake our research and writing (Blain and Wallis 2007, 36). Archaeological methods for excavation, the creation of typologies and scientific dating methods seek to provide rigorous ways to create an interpretation that can be defended as 'authentic'.

Heritage studies have increasingly striven to tell different stories based on alternative concepts of 'authenticity' that do not depend to the same extent on dividing the tangible and intangible or upon entirely distancing the past from the present (Jones and Yarrow 2022). As such, the relevance of the division between authorised and unauthorised heritage is challenged in the case studies included in this volume, although we cannot entirely dismiss these terms since they are so fundamental to the rules and regulations that order approaches.

Our research led us to explore the concept of authorised heritage discourse and its limitations to the issues that we foreground, addressing why the concept represented a problem in relation to the kinds of interpretations that we want to develop. For example, in the various museum contexts explored in Part II of this book, there are a variety of actors with intersecting but distinct perspectives on these pasts. In these contexts, there are no neat dividing lines between the knowledge of archaeologists and other groups. Often the ideas of heritage professionals and archaeologists are framed without determining the ideas of the range of other people who engage with the pasts at these sites – from paid guides with limited formal expertise to volunteers, and visitors. These narratives entangle ideas and material contexts in ways that go beyond a straightforward opposition between tangible and intangible heritage. The concepts of 'experiential authenticity' and 'material authenticity' are explored below (Chapter 3), emphasising how performances at open-air museums tend to draw on experiences handed down by generations of living history practitioners (and archaeologists).

In the chapters of the book, we aim to foreground a more nuanced understanding of the intersection and inter-penetration of differently positioned and authorised versions of the past through cases studies at Iron Age and Roman places.

Reconnecting Iron Age and Roman pasts to the present

To explore Iron Age and Roman heritages we have addressed how concepts from the immediately pre-Roman and Roman pasts are drawn upon in Britain today. Our focus is primarily on concepts and materials (artefacts and sites) that have origins in the Iron Age and the Roman period. Many of our examples are focused in and around particular places – heritage venues and ancient monuments – connected with these periods. We set out in 2016 to highlight the importance of this topic to a wide variety of people across Britain and to emphasise the comparative lack of research undertaken. In this section, we reflect on the previous studies of Iron Age and Roman heritages in Britain and overseas that inspired the approaches pursued in this book. The research briefly introduced here forms part of a far more substantial literature that addresses approaches to heritage.

General studies of the uses of Iron Age and Roman heritages in the modern world include Dietler's innovative paper 'Celticism, Celtitude and Celticity' (2006) and a study of the uses of Roman heritage in Brazil by Garraffoni and Funari (2012). Bonacchi's recent volume also addresses social media uses of both the Iron Age and Roman pasts (2022). There is a strong tradition of undertaking research on the presentations of the Iron Age and the Roman past at museums in Britain (Ballard 2007; Beard and Henderson 1999; Clarke 1996; Clarke and Hunter 2001; Givens 2024; Mills 2013; Mills 2021; Mytum 1999; Polm 2016; Roberts 2021). Other contributions have considered the display and interpretation of ancient monuments (Alberti and Mountain 2022; Cadw 2011; Lloyd Brown and Patrick 2011; Mytum 2004; Totten and Lafrenz Samuels 2012). This research has grown out of the natural desire of heritage professions to attract many visitors and different audiences and to provide more informed interpretations for these customers.

Other researchers have explored the aims and purposes of the reconstruction of Iron Age and Roman buildings at 'open-air museums'. Many of the earliest publications in this field focused on the analytical methodology of the experimental approaches behind the reconstructed buildings, including roundhouses and Roman forts (Barrie and Dixon 2007; Bidwell, Miket and Ford 1988; Hobley 1983; Mytum 1999; Mytum 2004; Reynolds 1979). A few studies address the lived experiences of those who work at or visit these venues, including the innovative work of John Percival (1980) for the TV programme *Living in the Past*. Another significant early study focuses on the portrayal of the Celtic past at the open-air museum at Castell Henllys in Pembrokeshire (Gruffudd, Herbert and Piccini 1998).

A linked topic that has become more popular focuses attention on how the Iron Age and Roman past is represented through re-enactment and living history. Some accounts have been openly critical of the images of the past that such performances present to the public, particularly regarding Roman legionary re-enactment (Appleby 2005; González-Álvarez and Alonso González 2013), while others have made more open (or ethnographic) observations without adopting an overtly critical perspective (Brædder et al. 2017, 178–81; Holtorf 2014). Researchers in the UK have become more deeply involved in Roman re-enactment with the intention of using these performances to attract and educate the public (Bishop and Mills 2021; Brown and Robson 2022; Griffiths 2021). The ethnographic approach that has been adopted in studies of pagan attitudes to megalithic sites and prehistoric burials also provides models for exploring how and why particular attitudes to the past are adopted by contemporary actors (Blain and Wallis 2007; Rathouse 2016; Rathouse 2021). These studies do not, however, address Iron Age or Roman 'places' since pagans are mostly attracted to megalithic remains and natural features such as springs.

Community archaeology is an increasingly important topic and, indeed, one that is witnessing involvement from professional archaeologists because of the growing need to demonstrate the impact of the discipline and the popularity of the grants provided by the UK's National Lottery Heritage Fund (hereafter NLHF), which funds community heritage projects across Britain (Bewley and Maeer 2014). Some publications and websites have explored the contributions of archaeologists to community projects in the UK (including CBA 2017; Dalglish 2013; Hedge and Nash 2016; Mitchell and Colls 2020; Simpson and Williams 2008; Thomas 2010) and significant international research has also been undertaken (Atalay 2012; Cipolla and Hayes 2015). These assessments have explored the context and potential of community archaeology projects. They contain too little exploration, however, of the ways that these initiatives have built upon and transformed ideas about the past.

An ethnographic methodology formed part of the justification for the *Ancient Identities* project (Hingley, Bonacchi and Sharpe 2018). Ethnographic theory suggests that archaeologists should be open to exploring how various people draw upon concepts of the past in their lives and thoughts. The overtly critical agenda behind Celto-scepticism and the post-colonial critique of Romanisation stand in stark contrast with an open agenda that aims to address varying receptions of ideas and materials from the past (Hingley 2015). These critical approaches, which have been common in archaeology, identify 'false' and 'bad' uses of the past that are

effectively 'corrected' through recourse to a different set of archaeological understandings. This is an important approach within archaeology, but is not how ethnographers tend to operate. Part I of this book retains a traditional critical focus. It also seeks to identify some of the reasons people draw upon the past in particular ways and some of the distinctive ways in which people communicate about these pasts – in re-enactment, at indoor and open-air museums. Part II is more directly ethnographic, aiming to understand how these ideas are embedded in contemporary social practice and seeking to account for their appeal in these various social contexts.

We must recognise and engage with potentially extremist views and communicate alternative perspectives, especially since ancient identities in the UK have become so politically highly charged. These uses are not, however, within the remit of the materials covered in this volume. Chiara Bonacchi's monograph (2022), which formed one of the outputs from the *Ancient Identities* project, addresses that topic more directly.

Iron Age and Roman places

This book explores how different groups of people in Britain respond to Iron Age and Roman pasts, primarily focusing upon how these ideas are tied to specific places (locations, venues). To provide a framework, we pursue how policies, practices and performances relate to the material vestiges of locations that tie in with these periods of the past. These Iron Age and Roman places include ancient monuments, archaeological sites and finds, museums, open-air museums and heritage centres (cf. Samuel 1994, 39).

Museums form a vital context for communicating the past to local people and visitors. The *Ancient Identities* project considered the presentation of the Iron Age and Roman pasts at on-site museums at ancient monuments such as Roman forts, towns and villas. The national and regional museums generally feature multiple periods of the past, focusing on collections of objects with displays sometimes including material from several periods. These museums provided insights into how the Iron Age and Roman pasts are presented in relation – often in contrast – to each other. Several accounts of museums have been published, some of which influenced our investigations (Beard and Henderson 1999; Clarke and Hunter 2001; Polm 2016). This book, however, is primarily concerned with Iron Age and Roman 'places', so only those museum displays complementing specific ancient monuments or reconstructions are considered here (see Chapter 2 for further discussion).

A fundamental theme is the interrogation of the spaces and places that are claimed by different forms of Iron Age and Roman heritages (see Harvey et al. 2001, 3). Some of these places are ancient, while others are modern collections of structures that focus attention on acts of reconstruction and living history. In common with many recent heritage studies, we have an interest in (post)modernity, popular culture, representation and consumption (Basu 2006; Dietler 2006; Giaccardi 2012; Gibson, Trower and Tregidga 2013; Harrison 2013; Harvey et al. 2001; Samuel 1994), but our main aim is to explore how these media relate to the material residues of the past, building upon the values inherent in what is sometimes termed 'tangible' heritage (Lafrenz Samuels and Totten 2012).

Our approach involves thinking about the interconnectedness of materials and meanings – how 'tangible' sites of heritage are contexts for various more and less tangible forms of social practice and how meanings congeal and cohere as particular forms of 'tangible' material culture. In other words, how the 'intangible' always takes tangible forms and how the 'tangible' is always a site for meanings and imaginations of an ostensibly 'intangible' kind.

A concern with memory links many recent studies of heritage (see Rowlands and de Jong 2007). Ideas about memories and places have played a considerable role in heritage studies and have been adopted and adapted in recent studies (including Basu 2006; Cresswell and Hoskins 2008, 394–6; Graham, Mason and Newman 2009; Isherwood 2013; Silberman and Purser 2012, 19; Warnaby, Medway and Bennison 2010, 1374–5). We explore how memories and origin myths relate to – or have been made to relate to – Iron Age and Roman places across England, Scotland and Wales. Archaeologists have often aimed to undermine the idea that inherited memories can relate to ancient remains (for example, Reynolds 1979, 14). The research explored below addresses the concept of memory in a far more open fashion. It has been suggested, for example, that fieldwork and research can involve 'the rediscovery of lost memories, the preserving of fragile memories and the making of new memories' (Isherwood 2013, 77). How are these memories created, by whom and why?

Many of the ideas that explain the archaeological materials derived from the ancient past originally stemmed from the writings of classical authors (Hingley 2011). The writings of these authors, including Julius Caesar, Tacitus and Cassius Dio, about ancient Britain used to be taken quite literally to portray what happened. A century of archaeological research has caused many of these ideas to be questioned in scholarship,

including the assumed benefits of the Roman 'civilising' of 'barbarians' and the violence of pre-Roman society (Hingley 2022). How do the 'tangible' remains of the Iron Age and Roman pasts persist in today's landscape as sites for imaginations of an ostensibly 'intangible' kind?

In their study of Angel Island (San Francisco) and Maxwell Street (Chicago) Tim Cresswell and Gareth Hoskins (2008, 395) have argued:

> The materiality of place has the most obvious connotations to memory and memorialisation. The material nature of buildings and roads and passageways means that they endure – not for ever perhaps – but for a considerable passage of time. Endurance provides an anchor for stories that circulate in and around a place.

Many of the accounts of Iron Age and Roman heritages explored in this volume seek to link physical remains and artefacts with ideas of ancestors and 'otherness' by bringing the past into an intimate connection with the present through various forms of living history. These approaches help to create a concept of experiential authenticity for heritage managers and guides who have interacted with the tangible heritage of open-air museums, in some cases for over four decades (see below).

The locations drawn upon in this study include a range of ancient and modern places. We explore how these venues – which include ancient monuments, open-air museums, reconstructions of ancient buildings, museums and heritage centres – relate to concepts of memory and origin. Many Iron Age and Roman 'ancient monuments' were built and rebuilt over a considerable period in the past and have been uncovered and brought to life in the modern world through excavation, consolidation and display, becoming sedimented in the present as a result of their lengthy history of reconstruction (Hingley 2012, 11–12). Open-air museums have entirely reconstructed buildings that draw upon an image of the authentic past but are actually (usually) a product entirely of the present. They build upon information from archaeological excavation to display the past in an experimental fashion and/or through living history (Paardekooper 2013). These material environments are considered to provide appropriate contexts to represent the past through experimentation and performance.

These Iron Age and Roman places are created either in part, or almost entirely, through the beliefs and activities that lead to their definition and interpretation. They are in permanent evolution and open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting (Nora 1989, 9), through actions that contribute to the conceptual and physical character

of such places through time. This exemplifies the complexities of such places, since we argue that the logic that is used to define some of these official forms of heritage is invested with another form of 'symbolic aura' through the process of scientific or analytical reasoning that lies at the heart of many attempts to define what might constitute 'official' heritage (Nora 1989, 19).

This relationship across the boundary between creative and constraining forms of heritage is a core theme throughout this book. In this context, heritage has less to do with structures, objects and display and more to do with making sense of our memories and developing a sense of identity through shared and repeated interaction with remains derived from the past (Giaccardi 2012, 1). Our focus in the chapters is upon how material manifestations of past Iron Age and Roman lives relate to understandings of the past that are created through physical and embodied interactions, including visiting ancient sites, reconstructing buildings, re-enacting and performing living history. How are Iron Age and Roman materials called upon to perform particular roles in contemporary society and how do archaeological practices affect and influence these heritages (Lafrenz Samuels and Totten 2012, 13)?

We explore the intentions of the people who establish, work at, work with and visit these public places, addressing the extent to which heritage policy often dictates the display of established and relatively unchanging concepts of heritage as a tangible accompaniment for what might be termed 'elite-focused' history (cf. Smith and Waterton 2012, 163). The Iron Age and Roman monuments owned and cared for by the UK's national heritage organisations – English Heritage, Cadw, Historic Environment Scotland and the National Trust – include exceptional and high-status remains, with some of the most impressive Iron Age hillforts and brochs, Roman cities, villas, forts and fortresses and frontier systems (Chapter 2). These sites inevitably result in a focus of interpretation on the culture of the most wealthy and well-connected people of the Roman province (see Hingley 2000, 149–52). All these heritage agencies, however, have broadened the range of messages and experiences at these venues for their visitors.

Archaeological research has evolved to enable us to tell many other different stories about the Iron Age and Roman pasts (e.g. Kamash 2021; Millett, Revell and Moore 2016; Moore and Armada 2011). Other forms of Iron Age and Roman heritages – official and unofficial – have developed to communicate different views of the past. It is an ongoing challenge to keep these manifestations, and the concepts on which they

are based, in a state of continual transformation – and to achieve this while retaining public interest and incorporating new archaeological interpretations.

The structure of this book

The book is divided into two parts. Throughout Part I, we consider how venues, practices and projects have adopted and adapted the insistent dualities that characterise ideas about the ancient past. We explore how the ways in which the past has been presented, both in the educational materials produced for use in UK classrooms and in recent archaeological interpretations, have impacted upon the places at which Iron Age and Roman periods can be explored and the performances and projects that address these ancient pasts. Why do people draw on the past in the range of ways that they do and what might these physical and intellectual resources mean to them? This section of the book explores the venues at which people can experience the Iron Age and Roman pasts, how the past is performed by re-enactors and the character of the projects funded with public money by the NLHF.

Almost all the ancient monuments of Roman date that are available to the public were taken into care decades ago and they tend to exhibit an elite-focused perspective that emphasises the role of the Roman military and the wealthy, privileged local leaders of the south, living in villas and constructing urban facilities in the towns (Chapter 2). The Iron Age monuments, including the hillforts and brochs, mainly relate to power and physical defence. Despite the high-status sites of the majority of these Iron Age and Roman sites, heritage agencies and museum interpreters have updated the perspectives communicated to the public to reflect more recent archaeological research.

A significant development since the 1970s has been the reconstruction of Iron Age roundhouses at many locations across the UK (Chapter 3). This fashion for reconstructing has led to a completely different perspective, expressing an idea of Iron Age communal living and environmental sustainability that contradicts previous interpretations of the period as a violent and unsettled time. There has been a substantial change in public perceptions of the Iron Age that has impacted, for instance, upon the materials made available through the BBC educational resource, Bitesize (above). NLHF-funded projects assessed in Chapter 5 indicate how this fashion for recreating a communal and environmentally sustainable Iron Age has now spread beyond the

realms of archaeology and heritage. The contrasting reconstructions of Roman buildings are far rarer than the Iron Age roundhouses, and some attempts have been made at several sites to communicate that not all Roman-period Britons lived in substantial and impressive villas.

Chapter 4 addresses re-enactment and draws a contrast with an alternative field of performance titled 'living history'. Re-enactment traditionally focused on military performance, fighting and marching. Staged battles between Roman legionaries and Iron Age warriors have become less common, as living history performances have proliferated. Living history focuses on the portrayal of an imagined version of everyday life, often communicating egalitarian and sustainable lifeways. Critical assessments of Roman re-enactment have highlighted the inauthentic ways in which these performances have reflected the Roman past. The focus of this chapter is to explore why living history has assumed a more prominent role in performing the past.

Chapter 5, on community archaeology, assesses the extent to which projects funded by the NLHF correspond to ideas of archaeology as a field of practice defined by methodologies. The narrow definition of archaeology in most guidance documents focuses on fieldwork, specifically surveys, excavations and post-excavation processes, and emphasises the need for professional input into these aspects of community projects. Concepts derived from experimental archaeology and education are often fitted into these approaches. A wider definition of archaeology is proposed, in which practitioners might be involved in addressing all aspects of the Iron Age and Roman pasts, including the theme termed by the NLHF 'commemoration' ('telling the stories and histories of people, communities, places or events related to specific times and dates'). This chapter explains that it has been simpler for community groups to create projects that commemorate the Iron Age past and that a higher proportion of the Roman projects have addressed the discovery, management, excavation, display and communication of physical relics.

In Part II, the method and focus shift, to examine lived realities associated with these pasts. Informed by ethnographic methods and sensibilities, we consider the everyday experiences of those involved in curating and presenting the past. Building on the work of Pierre Nora (1989), we highlight how authorised understandings of heritage venues as being 'removed from time' conceal how official pasts are creatively reworked by managers, visitors and others (Smith and Waterton 2012). The observations in these chapters are based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews at five of the ancient monuments and open-air museums visited by Kate Sharpe and an additional visit to the London Mithraeum

Table 1.2 A list of places included in the discussion in Part II

Venue	Date visited, number of days on site	Site type	Period
Aquae Sulis, Roman Bath, North East Somerset	October 2018, one day	Ancient monument, museum	Roman
Butser Ancient Farm, Hampshire	April 2018, five days	Open-air museum	Multi
Castell Henllys, Pembrokeshire	May 2018, four days	Ancient monument, open-air museum	Iron Age, Roman
London Mithraeum, Bloomberg Space, London	April 2019, May 2023, two days	Ancient monument, interpretation centre	Roman
The Scottish Crannog Centre, Tayside	September 2017, six days	Open-air museum	Iron Age
Vindolanda, Northumberland	June 2017, August 2017, nine days	Ancient monument, museum	Roman

by Richard Hingley (Table 1.2). Further background to the methodology is provided in the introduction to Part II.

Chapter 6 focuses on the role of physical places in creating connections and disconnections with the past. Drawing on field visits to several open-air museums and ancient monuments we describe how Iron Age and Roman pasts are imaginatively conjured through the material and spatial qualities of these sites and through the choreography of people's bodily movements in these spaces. We examine how reconstructed settlements use the space to create 'authentic' experiences, in part through the exclusion and denial of contemporaneity. Finally, we consider how urban heritage sites have managed contemporary intrusions – both excluding them and embracing them.

Chapter 7 examines some of the devices employed by heritage venues to help the public engage with and experience past people. By connecting to their visitors on a personal level, through objects, characters, role-playing and hands-on participation, the heritage venues that we have explored seek to provide a more holistic experience of the past. How does this draw people more fully into past worlds and prompt comparison and analogy with modern life? How important is 'evidence' and authenticity, however defined, when presenting the less tangible aspects of life in a roundhouse or within a Roman fort? Drawing on discussions with guides, educators and volunteers at both Iron Age and

Roman venues, we examine some of the practices and the messages conveyed to engage, educate and entertain visitors.

Finally, Chapter 8 seeks to draw some of the observations from both parts together, by exploring the range of ways that the Iron Age and Roman periods are drawn upon today at a range of heritage venues. Here, our aim is not to draw summary or general conclusions. Rather, we unwind the broader conceptual possibilities that expand from the specifics of these cases.

Initially, in Part I we turn attention to the ancient monuments of Iron Age and Roman date available for the public to visit.

Note

1 Some individual school authorities and local authorities across England have supplemented the materials available from the BBC with far more innovative resources. The educational project, *Life in the Roman World*, developed at the University of Leicester for school pupils in the city provides one excellent example (Scott et al. 2023).

Part I
Places and practices: venues, community archaeology and re-enactments

Richard Hingley

This part of the book addresses the ancient monuments and open-air museums (locations with no specific archaeological remains) at which the Iron Age and Roman periods are displayed to the public. It explores how ideas of the past have been communicated to visitors and considers the opportunities and constraints of these venues. The topic of re-enactment is addressed and, finally, community archaeological projects that focus on Iron Age and Roman themes are considered. The aim is to show how insistent dualities are manifested in these contexts and to reveal the efforts made by heritage managers, re-enactors and community groups to provide challenging interpretations of the past. One remarkable issue is that, despite the resources invested in these heritage fields, there is little published research.

The four chapters in Part I derive from research undertaken by Richard Hingley for the *Ancient Identities* project. They draw upon the few published studies on these topics, site visits to many of the open-air museums and ancient monuments, and the relevant information available on the internet at the time of the completion of the research. The nine online data tables are provided in the Durham University research repository (Hingley 2024)[1] providing details of the information collected for the theme that forms the focus for each chapter. These data tables are drawn upon and referenced in Chapters 2–5 (they are not to be confused with the eight tables included in the text of this book).

2
Ancient monuments: whose places?

> From the richer and more populous areas [of Roman Britain] objects of greater intrinsic value and more advanced art might be expected, but from the poorer agricultural regions not less valuable evidence of the local conditions of the settled mass of the population of the country may be obtained.
>
> (Pitt Rivers 1898, 12)

Introduction: Iron Age and Roman places

Iron Age and Roman 'places', as defined in this study, constitute the ancient monuments and open-air museums made accessible and displayed to the public. These heritage venues are central to how visitors experience and understand these past periods. Chapter 2 addresses the ancient monuments – physical relics of the ancient past – managed by and displayed to the public across Britain today. These sites are mainly in the 'care' of the UK's three national archaeology organisations – Cadw, Historic Environment Scotland (Àrainneachd Eachdraidheil Alba) and English Heritage. In addition, many ancient monuments are cared for and interpreted by other organisations, including the National Trust and local authorities. The chapter seeks to explore how these monuments characterise the Iron Age and Roman pasts and the recent attempts of the agencies that display them to bring them to life for visitors.

The focus on ancient monuments here is intended to address the extent to which heritage policy has served to define the Iron Age and Roman pasts as a tangible asset through the legal definition and the physical defining and partial remaking of these places (see Smith and

Waterton 2012, 163). The exploration of the monuments of these two periods emphasises differences in the ways that they are interpreted and illuminates some of the dualities outlined in Chapter 1. The ancient monuments owned by and cared for by the three state archaeology services were mainly taken into care during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The majority relate to the Roman period, especially across England. The Roman examples include many of the most highly monumental – the exceptional remains of fortresses, forts, frontiers (Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall), towns and villas. Across England and Wales, a handful of hillforts and Iron Age settlements present an image of the immediately pre-Roman period as unsettled and characterised by fighting. The brochs of Scotland also present a contrasting expression of Iron Age peoples who were able to build monumental stone structures of, apparently, defensive form.

The monuments of these ancient times help to reflect an old and formerly well-established tradition of study in England that: (1) the Iron Age was an unsettled warrior society; and (2) the Romans brought order and civilised life to the peoples of southern Britain through military conquest and the establishment of urban society (Hingley 2000, 149–52). Public attitudes to the ancient past in Scotland, Wales and Cornwall often interpret the Romans as colonial invaders and the Iron Age peoples more favourably. Beneficial interpretations of the impact of the Roman conquest once dominated academic accounts of the ancient British past, although archaeologists have aimed to refocus study since the 1970s (see Hingley 2000; Millett, Revell and Moore 2016). The monuments available for the public to visit have remained largely the same for many decades, although occasional excavations produce new information for visitors. Changing interpretations of the Iron Age and Roman pasts are communicated on information boards, in published guides, displays of Roman life in museums and on the internet.

Guardianship monuments

Lieutenant General Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers was the first inspector of ancient monuments in Britain. Pitt Rivers was fascinated by the monuments he located on his landed estate on Cranborne Chase (Dorset) and communicated a very different view of the Roman past from many of his contemporaries. He was also responsible for taking the first guardianship monuments into care.

From the perspective of authorised heritage discourse, there could be nothing much more official than a guardianship monument. The

Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979) enabled monuments to be taken into 'state care', or into local authority care, with the owner's agreement, through signing a deed of guardianship (Breeze 2016, 62–3). This procedure was first introduced in Britain by the Ancient Monuments Protection Act in 1882 (Fry 2014a, 5). This Act required the government to maintain and protect the sites taken into guardianship, although the landowner retained the freehold over the land. As monuments were acquired, some were gifted to the government department, or purchased, while others remained in the hands of their original owners. This Act also included provisions to appoint one or more inspectors of ancient monuments, a policy that continues in England and Wales today. Pitt Rivers, the first inspector, visited monuments across Britain and added them to the list. He also undertook excavations at several ancient monuments as part of his role as inspector, establishing a practice continued by the inspectors who followed him until the 1980s.

The Schedule of Ancient Monuments was initially primarily restricted to prehistoric examples (Fry 2014a, 6). It was gradually extended as new sites were added – this is how this remarkable and significant collection of monuments came to be held and displayed for the public. In the updated version of the Ancient Monuments Act, these places are termed 'guardianship monument' or 'properties in care' (Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, sections 12–15). The Act includes a right of access to guardianship sites for members of the public (Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, section 19; Breeze 2016, 62). Monuments were usually taken into state care because of their archaeological, architectural or historical importance. This portfolio includes remains of all periods, from the Neolithic to the present day. These monuments have been acquired since the late nineteenth century and, mostly, before the 1970s. Some of these monuments in Wales and Scotland are still owned by the state, while others are in private ownership or belong to trusts and public bodies. They are mainly cared for by the three national organisations.

There are around 400 guardianship sites of various dates in England, 300 in Scotland and 128 in Wales. Around 14 per cent of the total date to the Iron Age and Roman periods (Table 2.1): 65 in England, 39 in Scotland and 13 in Wales. This includes Iron Age and Roman sites that are cared for by English Heritage, Historic Environment Scotland and Cadw. These three heritage organisations were created in 1984 as successors to the Ministry of Works and the Ministry for the Environment. They were quasi-autonomous of the government of the time (Ferrero 2005, 244). Historic Scotland, now Historic Environment Scotland (HES), and Cadw

Table 2.1 Guardianship monuments of Iron Age and Roman date in England, Scotland and Wales

Country	Iron Age	Roman period	Total number of sites of all dates
England	12	53	c. 400
Scotland	25	14	c. 300
Wales	5	8	128
Total	**42**	**75**	**c. 828**

retain direct connections to the Scottish and Welsh parliaments, acting as official advisors, seeking to protect archaeological monuments of national importance and holding a range of monuments in guardianship and displaying them to the public (Hunter and Ralston 2016, 41). HES states: 'Our mission is to sustain and enhance the benefits of Scotland's historic environment, for people and communities now and into the future' (Historic Environment Scotland n.d.a). Cadw is the Welsh Government historic environment service and works for: 'an accessible and well-protected historic environment' (Cadw 2024). English Heritage was converted into a charitable trust in 2015 that looks after the national heritage collection (including the guardianship sites). At this time, Historic England, which champions the nation's wider heritage, split off from English Heritage.

The involvement of these three public organisations that have acquired and still display these guardianship sites effectively defines these places as authorised heritage. The legislation under which they were taken into care emphasises the idea of the official and the tangible (see Smith 2004; Smith and Waterton 2012, 153–4). Changes in government policy since the 1990s, however, have led to profound changes in the rise of discourses of social value and significance and the ways that state and official organisations manage 'values' rather than focusing on the physicality of the monuments (Jones and Yarrow 2022, 4–8). This has seen a shift away from the old-school regulatory and protection regimes to the idea of 'managing change' and an emphasis on the financial value of the past.

The websites of all three organisations that display guardianship sites demonstrate the extent to which they attempt to get beyond the former guidelines of state care and protection. They do this by emphasising the living history of their guardianship monuments and the idea that visiting can lead to entertaining days out for the family. English Heritage proclaims: 'Live and breathe the story of England at royal castles, historic gardens, forts & defences, world-famous prehistoric

sites many others' (English Heritage n.d.a). HES comments: 'With access to the country's most iconic landmarks, including its castles, abbeys, cathedrals, and much more, you can create unforgettable memories with your loved ones' (Historic Environment Scotland n.d.b).

The assembly of ancient places

Exploring the figures in Table 2.1, England has over four times as many Roman monuments as those of the Iron Age. For Scotland, the Iron Age monuments are in the majority, reflecting the excellent preservation of many stone-built Iron Age brochs and souterrains. The Romans conquered southern and eastern Scotland for comparatively short periods, so relatively few Roman-period monuments were constructed. There are no Roman monuments to visit in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, and the impressive Iron Age brochs dominate public perceptions of the ancient past alongside the Pictish symbol stones. Wales has a slight predominance of Roman monuments over those of the Iron Age, reflecting the long history of Roman military occupation. The Roman forts in Wales are sometimes viewed as symbols of foreign oppression, a view of the ancient past that is shared by some people of central and northern Britain. Of course, all three countries also have Neolithic, Bronze Age, early medieval and medieval ancient monuments in care, although they are not addressed here.

These guardianship sites are some of our best preserved and most important Iron Age and Roman ancient monuments and an asset for all interested in the ancient past. They also provide excellent places for school visits and student field trips. It is a considerable surprise that there is so little published research that explores the significance and educational potential of these monuments. A rare exception is provided by Cadw's twin interpretational frameworks for prehistory and for the Roman period (Cadw 2011; Lloyd Brown and Patrick 2011). All three heritage organisations provide information about individual monuments on the internet, although the amount of detail differs from country to country and site to site. The more substantial and popular of the sites are manned while several have onsite museums. Guidebooks are available for purchase for some of these sites and information boards situated on the sites explain the remains for visitors. On occasions, excavations are conducted at high-profile sites to improve visitor access or to manage damage or erosion.

No archive of the Iron Age and Roman ancient monuments is available online. We have collected information from the Cadw, English

Heritage and HES websites for the monuments these organisations hold in guardianship (available as Online Data Table 1[2]). In addition, some impressive ancient monuments are owned or managed for the public by local authorities and other agencies and trusts. The Roman-period monuments made accessible to the public by trusts and local authorities are also listed in Online Data Table 1. It is much more difficult to identify Iron Age sites in the hands of local authorities and other trusts that are accessible to the public, although information is available for the National Trust, which provides access to many hillforts (Online Data Table 2).

Museums across Britain also include displays about these periods of the ancient past. The data collection identified 34 onsite museums at Roman ancient monuments and urban sites (Online Data Table 3). Only three onsite museums dedicated to the Iron Age exist, along with the Museum of the Iron Age (Andover), which interprets the Iron Age hillfort at Danebury (Hampshire; Hampshire Cultural Trust n.d.). In addition, museums at Colchester, Verulamium (St Albans), Cirencester and the London Museum communicate information about the Iron Age in addition to the Roman period.[3]

The number and prominence of the Roman ancient monuments and the frequency of displays of the Roman past at museums across England and southern Wales emphasise the higher profile of this period compared to the Iron Age. Pete Wilson (2016, 52) observes that the popularity of the Roman past in the public arena reflects the 'televisual' character of Roman sites and finds, which supplements the coverage of Roman Britain in the national curriculum for schools in England. We shall see in the following chapter, however, that a remarkable campaign of roundhouse reconstruction at open-air museums since the early 1970s has served to highlight the Iron Age in the public mind.

Iron Age ancient monuments

The Iron Age monuments available to the public are mainly located in southern and south-western England and Scotland, with outliers in Anglesey, south Wales, the Welsh Marches and northern England (Figure 2.1). The concentration in the south of England reflects the impressive hillforts of this area, while, in Cornwall, several well-preserved settlements and souterrains are in guardianship. The range of Iron Age monuments in Scotland reflects the excellent preservation of these stone-built structures. Many of the Iron Age sites consist of earthworks,

Figure 2.1 Map showing Iron Age guardianship monuments in Britain. Drawn by Christina Unwin.

rather than the remains of standing stone buildings, that tend to present difficulties for many visitors without a training in field archaeology. The substantial remains of Roman stone buildings at towns and forts (along with castles, monasteries and eighteenth-century country houses) are far easier to display and interpret. The only Iron Age guardianship monuments with substantial building remains are the brochs of Scotland and the two courtyard house settlements in Cornwall. In addition, many of the Iron Age monuments are in the countryside and distant from towns and urban centres. These factors may help to provide a contrasting sense of 'otherness' when these Iron Age sites are compared to Roman and medieval sites (Chapters 3, 6 and 7).

Three of the 42 Iron Age monuments in guardianship across England, Scotland and Wales charge visitors for entry. Two of these have onsite museums and buildings where the public can shelter in bad weather. These are three of the most impressive and substantial Iron Age monuments in Britain, at Chysauster (Cornwall), Gurness Broch (Orkney) and Jarlshof (Shetland). Although the 'village' at Chysauster originated during the Iron Age, the impressive 'courtyard houses' were built during the Roman period. Many more Roman sites have an entry charge, and there are also many more onsite museums at the Roman sites, reflecting the higher public profile of this period. Nevertheless, some particularly impressive and well-known Iron Age hillforts can be visited and explored free of charge, including Bratton Camp (Wiltshire), Chesters (East Lothian), the Caterthuns (Angus), Maiden Castle (Dorset), Old Oswestry (Shropshire) and Uffington Castle (Oxfordshire).

A defensive and unsettled Iron Age?

What messages about the Iron Age do these guardianship monuments convey to people who wish to read about and visit them? Classifying the Iron Age guardianship monuments into four groups – *oppida*, hillforts, brochs and settlements – suggests that around 70 per cent derive from a tradition of defensive architecture (Figure 2.2). Only the 14 sites classed as 'settlements' are less obviously defensive. The classical texts that addressed the Roman expansion into western Europe described the barbaric behaviour of Gauls, Germans and Britons, identifying these people as unsettled and violently uncontrollable (Hingley 2011). Together with the regular discovery of ancient metal weapons during the nineteenth century, these defended settlements helped to define the Iron Age as an unsettled period dominated by warfare.

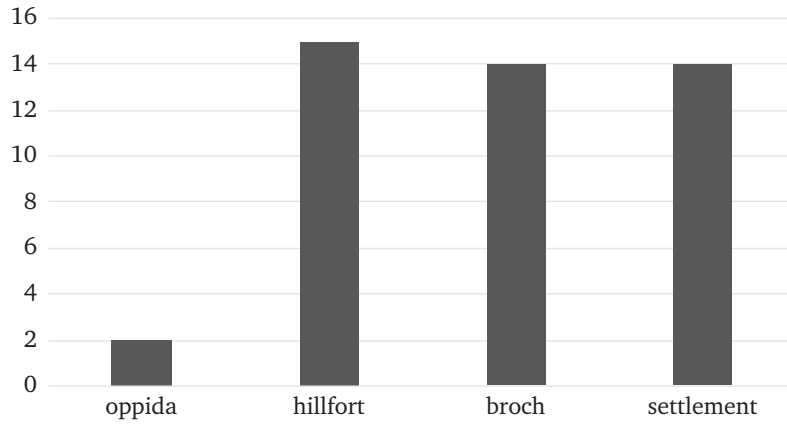

Figure 2.2 Chart showing types of Iron Age guardianship ancient monuments in Britain (showing number of sites on the y axis). © Richard Hingley.

Hillforts are the most characteristic type of site for the Iron Age across much of Britain (Haselgrove 2009, 156–8). Julius Caesar described attacking a hillfort in Kent during his campaigns in Britain in 54 BCE, and there is a long tradition of interpreting hillforts as defended strongholds (Hingley 2022, 35). This interpretation draws upon the defendable location in which hillforts were located, their banks, ramparts and ditches and also on Caesar's writings. It is not just English Heritage, HES and Cadw that display hillfort sites to the public. The National Trust also has many Iron Age sites on their landholdings, which they manage and interpret for the public (Online Data Table 2). Most of these sites are hillforts, although there are also several cliff castles (defended sites on coastal promontories).

Oppida constitute sites characteristic of the Late Iron Age of southern Britain and the short sections of the surrounding ramparts of the *oppida* at Camulodunum (Essex) and Stanwick (North Yorkshire) are in care.[4] Caesar also described an attack on the *oppidum* of the British leader Cassivellaunus during his campaign in south-eastern Britain, explaining the Britons had retreated to this place with their livestock when faced with mass Roman aggression (Hingley 2022, 36).

The brochs of Scotland form another significant category of monument. There are 14 in guardianship, including some fine examples. Many of the other brochs of the Scottish Highlands and Islands that are not in guardianship can also be explored by visitors, exploiting the less strict rules of land ownership in Scotland. One example that has recently been partially excavated and restored, with community support, is the

Figure 2.3 Photograph of Clachtoll Broch (Assynt, Sutherland). Photographed by Richard Hingley, 2019.

highly impressive broch at Clachtoll (Assynt, Sutherland; Figure 2.3). Brochs are architecturally complex stone buildings once interpreted as strongholds in which a local community could withdraw at times of conflict.

A less unsettled Iron Age

Ideas about the Iron Age have changed since the 1960s due to the discovery and excavation of many undefended, or only weakly defended, sites and the recognition of the settled nature of many Iron Age communities (Chapter 3). Interpretations of the functions of hillforts have changed because of extensive excavation work during the second half of the last century. Many of the most impressive hillforts were the homes of substantial communities (Harding 2012). They may have dominated populations in their areas, although the sustained occupation of hillforts such as Maiden Castle and Danebury illustrates that they were not entirely defensive in purpose. Other hillforts did not have much occupation, and perhaps these were locations for seasonal gatherings and gathering places at times of conflict.

The *oppida* of southern Britain are interpreted today as the meeting places and communal foci for relatively decentralised Late Iron Age peoples. Some of these *oppida* also appear to have been the centres for powerful Late Iron Age leaders, or, in Roman terms, 'kings' (Hingley 2022). The nature of society during the Late Iron Age, as these British leaders came into contact with Rome, is explored in some detail at the

Verulamium Museum and also at the Castle Museum at Colchester. Little of the Iron Age *oppida* can be viewed by the public at either site, but both these onsite museums provide informed discussion of the ways in which Roman-period urban sites at Colchester and Verulamium developed on the sites of the *oppida* (Hingley in press).

Although once considered defensive, the brochs of Scotland are now more commonly interpreted as elaborate houses in a society with relatively little social hierarchy (Armit 1997, 36–7). Occasionally they may have been defended against attackers, but it would have been possible for the attackers to burn a broch and anyone sheltering within it.

This changing agenda of interpretation for the Iron Age is reflected in the information provided about Iron Age monuments on the internet and by information boards on many sites. Maiden Castle (Dorset) is probably the most famous Iron Age hillfort in Britain because of the scale of its ramparts and the history of the excavations at the site (Figure 2.4). The extensive excavations undertaken by Mortimer Wheeler between 1934 and 1937 made a highly significant contribution to knowledge of the Iron Age in southern Britain (Stout 2008, 217–22). The excavations also had a cultural impact through the work of several artists (Causey 2013, 117–9; Fill 2016, 54–6). Maiden Castle is unusual among English Heritage's Iron Age sites since a research excavation was undertaken during the 1980s (Sharples 1991).

Figure 2.4 Photograph of Maiden Castle (Dorset), showing the scale of the Iron Age defences. Photographed by Richard Hingley, 2022. This site is in the guardianship of English Heritage.

Described on the internet as one of the largest and most complex Iron Age hillforts in Europe, the information for Maiden Castle online includes an audio guide that enables visitors to explore the monument on foot and describes the hillfort as having provided safety for its inhabitants but also serving as a statement of 'power and intimidation' (English Heritage n.d.b). It interprets the settlement occupying the interior as representing a 'highly complex society'. English Heritage provides accessible YouTube videos that give insights into the history of the site. One of these, linked into the Maiden Castle website, which has had over 25,000 visitors (March 2023), is a short, animated guide to Iron Age monuments that provides a straightforward explanation of the differences between classes of sites such as henges, barrows and hillforts (English Heritage 2017). Hillforts are described in this short video as: 'mainly built for defence and as places of refuge, also for show and as status symbols'. This accessible summary reflects recent interpretations of the function of at least the most substantial hillforts (cf. Haselgrove 2009, 156–8).

More imaginative is the 40-minute long 'Echoscape', first launched in 2017 and produced by the company titled Splash & Ripple (English Heritage n.d.c). Aiming to provide sounds and memories of Maiden Castle, this includes coverage of the viewpoints of two famous people who visited and admired the monument, the modernist painter Paul Nash and the writer Thomas Hardy. A third character, the Iron Age storyteller Nonna, who is entirely fictional, describes her life at Maiden Castle during an attack on the hillfort under the Roman legionary commander Vespasian. The narrator explains that the Echoscape aims to: 'ask us to consider our own place within Maiden Castle's ongoing history'. It emphasises the importance of this hillfort as a cultural asset while explaining its archaeological significance, aiming to bring its tangible remains to life. Information on the internet and information boards at other hillforts also tend to emphasise the communal value of these sites in addition to their (occasional) defensive functions.

The reinterpretation of the brochs of Scotland has also played down the idea that they served a primarily defensive function. Gurness Broch, taken into guardianship in 1931, is described on the internet as 'an impressive Iron Age complex' and 'one of the most outstanding examples of later prehistoric settlements to survive in Scotland' (Historic Environment Scotland n.d.c). There is little description of its potential function as a defended settlement on the internet or on the site. The guidebook to the *Monuments of Orkney* notes that

brochs were once interpreted as defensive structures and that the outworks that surround the settlement would support this, although the tower-like broch was an 'indication of the wealth and status of the local chief' (Wickham Jones 2018, 38). The brochs displayed by HES to the public are interpreted on the internet as outstanding examples of substantially defended round farmhouses, reflecting current archaeological understanding of these monuments (see Hunter and Carruthers 2012, 50).

The other class of Iron Age guardianship monuments across Britain are the settlements. The scarcity of settlements in care partly reflects the limitations of archaeological knowledge before the 1970s. This disparate class of sites includes enclosed (non-hillfort) sites, several open settlements and nine examples of souterrains/earth houses. Since the 1940s, it became apparent that a diverse and plentiful distribution of non-defended settlements characterised Iron Age Britain, including small farmsteads and extensive village-type sites (Haselgrove 2009, 149–60). Such well-preserved prehistoric settlements occur in large numbers across upland landscapes in south-western, western and northern Britain. These settlements, however, are not particularly easy to recognise or interpret unless the visitor has archaeological training (Lloyd Brown and Patrick 2011, 23). In some areas where well-preserved remains are common, examples have been taken into guardianship (for example, in Cornwall, Scilly, Anglesey and Scotland).

A few souterrains, which sometimes accompanied Iron Age settlements in Scotland, are also held in care. These are usually interpreted as stores for agricultural produce but also had a significant ritual function (Armit 1997, 70–3). The hut circle settlements of Anglesey and the two complex roundhouse settlements at Carn Euny and Chysauster in Cornwall provide significant examples of settlements that visitors can explore. The courtyard houses at the two Cornish sites are representative of a highly monumental style of stone architecture that developed in the immediately pre-Roman period and survived through the Roman centuries. These sites are identified as 'Romano-British' settlements by English Heritage (n.d.d). Taken into guardianship in 1931 (Chysauster) and 1953 (Carn Euny), they provide examples of Iron Age-style settlements to supplement the hillforts and Roman sites (Greaney 2017, 39–40).

The interpretation of the fogou at Carn Euny provides a rare opportunity for English Heritage to emphasise the 'otherness' of the Iron Age (Figure 2.5). The guidebook records that unusual architectural features suggest that fogous may have had some form of ceremonial

Figure 2.5 Photograph of the fogou (souterrain) at Carn Euny (Cornwall). Photographed by Richard Hingley, March 2024. This site is in the guardianship of English Heritage.

purpose 'as if these were powerful places that needed to be closed off at the end of their use' (Greaney 2017, 18). Offerings of flowers and food in the fogou and the clouties (fragments of cloth) tied up in trees at the neighbouring spring (just west of the ancient monument) show that some visitors to the site tie in with the spirit of this special place.

The acquisition of these two Cornish monuments as examples of a type of site poorly represented in the examples held in guardianship followed the agenda set by Pitt Rivers, who had highlighted the significance of Roman-period rural settlements during the late nineteenth century (Pitt Rivers 1898, 12; see Hingley 2008, 297). The farming communities of lowland areas of Britain lived in settlements formed of clusters of timber roundhouses. Many of these sites are now in arable fields, leaving little or no trace on the ground. They are often found through aerial photography and during archaeological evaluation in advance of developments. Across southern England, where several hillforts are made accessible to the public, no additional settlement sites are held in guardianship. Considering the difficulty many members of the public experience in identifying and interpreting subtle archaeological remains, the scarcity of Iron Age settlements in the guardianship monuments is unremarkable. Compensation for this limitation has been provided since the 1970s by the fashion for constructing reconstructed timber roundhouses.

Roman ancient monuments

There are almost twice as many Roman guardianship monuments as Iron Age examples (Figure 2.6; Table 2.2). These are not the only ancient monuments of Roman date available for the public to visit since our research has located another 43 sites made available to the public by other trusts and agencies. The total of 118 accessible Roman monuments contrasts with the 42 Iron Age monuments. The Roman past of Britain is also prominently displayed in museums (Online Data Table 3). There has been relatively little research undertaken on these Roman places and almost all of this has focused on museums (see Chapter 1).

Tables 2.2 and 2.3 displays the Roman monuments in the care of the state agencies and other trusts. The Roman-period monuments are broken down in these tables into the categories of military, urban, (rural) settlement, villa, religion.[5] Monuments related to the military (and to communication) form around 60 per cent of the total (Figures 2.7 and 2.8), with rather smaller proportions relating to the urban centres of the south, religious activity and rural settlements in the countryside (Figure 2.9).

Military sites

Before the early twentieth century, Roman Britain was considered a military province (Hingley 2008). The monuments include some famous examples of forts and frontier works that emphasise the Roman military

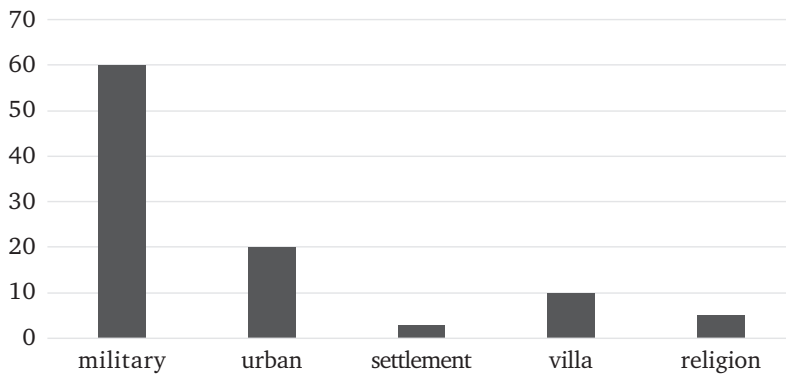

Figure 2.6 Chart of the types of Roman-period monuments made available to the public, including guardianship monuments and those in the care of other agencies and trusts (showing percentages of sites on the y axis). © Richard Hingley.

Table 2.2 The number of Roman-period sites in the care of state organisations and other agencies by country

Monuments displayed by English Heritage, Historic Environment Scotland and Cadw					
	Military	Urban	Settlement	Villa	Religion
England	34.5	9.5	2	3	4
Scotland	14				
Wales	5	1	2		
Total	**53.5**	**10.5**	**4**	**3**	**4**
Monuments displayed by other trusts and agencies					
	Military	Urban	Settlement	Villa	Religion
England	14	12.5		9	1.5
Scotland	1				
Wales	3	1	1		
Total	**18**	**13.5**	**1**	**9**	**1.5**
Total of all sites					
	Military	Urban	Settlement	Villa	Religion
Total	71.5	24	5	12	5.5

Table 2.3 The percentage of Roman-period sites in five categories

Monuments displayed by English Heritage, Historic Environment Scotland and Cadw					
	Military	Urban	Settlement	Villa	Religion
England	65%	18%	4%	6%	7%
Scotland	100%				
Wales	62%	12%	25%		
Total	**71%**	**14%**	**5%**	**4%**	**5%**
Monuments displayed by other trusts and agencies					
	Military	Urban	Settlement	Villa	Religion
England	38%	34%		24%	4%
Scotland	100%				
Wales	60%	20%	20%		
Total	**42%**	**31%**	**2%**	**20%**	**3%**
Total of all sites					
	Military	Urban	Settlement	Villa	Religion
Total	60%	20%	3%	10%	5%

Figure 2.7 Map of Roman military ancient monuments displayed to the public (excluding sites along the two Roman walls). Drawn by Christina Unwin.

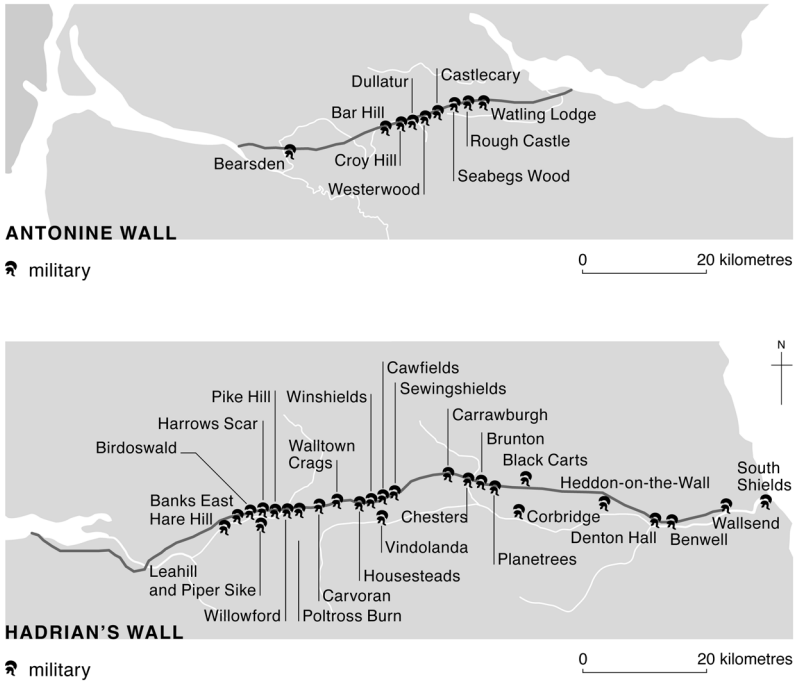

Figure 2.8 Maps of Roman military monuments displayed to the public on the two Roman walls. Drawn by Christina Unwin.

occupation of Britain, with a prime focus on the occupation of Wales and central Britain (northern England and southern Scotland). The forts along Hadrian's Wall and the sections of the curtain wall of this frontier work are particularly notable examples. The impressive central section of Hadrian's Wall was brought into guardianship during the early 1930s because of a significant threat of quarrying (Fry 2014b, 2–10). High-profile forts managed and interpreted by English Heritage include the remains at Chesters and Housesteads (in Northumberland) and Birdoswald (Cumbria). Chesters was extensively excavated in Victorian times, when work also commenced at Housesteads, although the main excavations at the latter site were between 1974 and 1981. Excavations have been undertaken more recently at Birdoswald to improve the visitor experience (Wilmott 2009). Part of the Roman cemetery to the east of the fort was excavated in 2009 because of the threat of river erosion, while additional work was undertaken on significant structures around the fort from 2021 to 2024 (Newcastle University/Historic England 2021). These excavations, combined with the redisplay of the monument, provide a higher public profile for the fort. The information derived from the fort

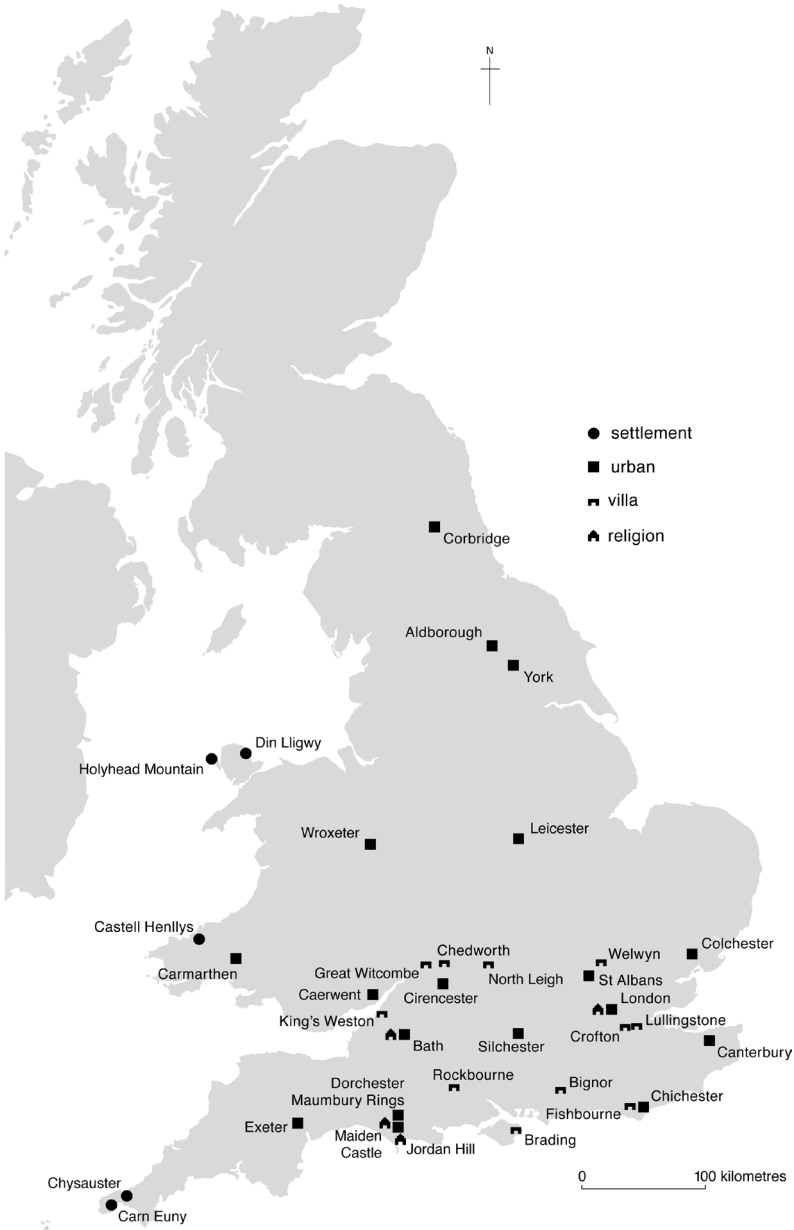

Figure 2.9 Map of Roman civil ancient monuments displayed to the public. Drawn by Christina Unwin.

has also been substantially updated in the past few years, creating an interactive experience for families with children (Roberts 2021).

English Heritage and other agencies have organised re-enactment events and art projects at monuments along the wall to advertise these ancient remains to visitors and to attract new audiences (Chapter 4). One example of an artwork was the colourful temporary reconstruction of the northern gateway of the Roman fort at Housesteads in Summer 2022 (Figure 2.10).

The other prominent sites along Hadrian's Wall are managed and displayed by various trusts and agencies. Vindolanda is one of the highest-profile Roman sites in Britain because of the sustained excavations and programmes of displays over the past 50 years. In 1973, the Vindolanda Trust reconstructed two sections of the curtain of Hadrian's Wall, one in turf and one in timber. These were carefully built beyond the edge of the archaeological site to avoid the buried archaeological remains (Birley 2009, 36–7). Since there was far less of the excavated remains of the fort and civil settlement for visitors to view at this time, the reconstructions

Figure 2.10 Photograph of the Housesteads art gateway, titled 'The future belongs to what was as much as what is'. Artwork by Morag Myrescough. Photographed by Richard Hingley, August 2022. Reproduced with the permission of English Heritage.

added to the attractions at the site. They have been restored in the past few years and still prove popular aspects of the onsite interpretation. The excavations have uncovered a sequence of forts and civil settlements and visitors can explore these impressive remains (Birley n.d.). An extensive and up-to-date museum displays the finds from the excavation, including the world-famous 'letters'.

The other Roman military monuments – across Wales, northern England and southern Scotland – include some impressive examples. This distribution may give the impression that the southern areas of Britannia were generally free from military control. Southern Britain was conquered soon after 43 CE by soldiers who lived in temporary timber and earth forts. Several Roman forts in eastern and southern coastal locations help demonstrate the presence of the Roman military outside the northern and western frontier regions. The scattering of Saxon shore forts indicates the efforts of the Roman administration to defend the southern and eastern coasts when they became threatened by seaborne raiders during the late third and fourth centuries. The excavation at Richborough (Kent) (between 1922 and 1938) uncovered the foundations of a Roman triumphal arch. The dating of the construction of this monument is currently in dispute (it may date to the 80s CE or the early third century). This Roman site was a port and town from the earliest phase of the invasion (Wilmott 2018, 32–3). The substantial remains of the Saxon shore forts at Richborough date to the late third and fourth centuries. An excavation of an amphitheatre on this site during 2021–3 aimed to improve visitor experiences (English Heritage n.d.e). The impressive masonry remains of other Saxon shore forts include those at Pevensey (East Sussex) and Portchester (Hampshire).

Urban sites

Although these military sites dominate the list of publicly accessible monuments, Roman urban sites are also significant and include the fragmentary remains of the urban walled circuits of several of the towns of Roman Britain, in addition to several amphitheatres and townhouses (Figure 2.11; Hingley in press). Many of these remains are conserved and displayed in modern urban centres, which have developed on the sites of Roman towns, such as Colchester, Cirencester, Exeter, Lincoln, Leicester and London. The ancient remains at Aldborough (North Yorkshire), Caerwent (Monmouthshire), Corbridge (Northumberland), Silchester (Hampshire) and Wroxeter (Shropshire) are in rural locations. Archaeological explorations commenced early at many of these sites,

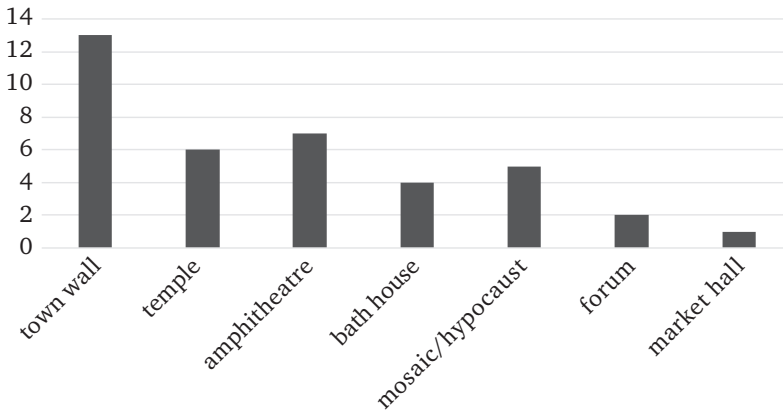

Figure 2.11 Chart showing types of building remains displayed in Roman urban centres (showing number of examples on the y axis). © Richard Hingley.

often leading to the taking into care of significant remains. The civil sites displayed by local authorities and other agencies include elements of the physical fabric of several Roman towns and some high-status houses.

These urban sites display a central theme of the long-established narrative about Roman Britain, emphasising the creation of settled civic life. The *civitas* capital at Wroxeter has some well-preserved remains of Roman standing buildings (White 2016, 46–8). The archaeological remains were taken into guardianship in 1947 following the substantial Victorian excavations. Additional excavations have uncovered an extensive cluster of public buildings, including the baths. The onsite museum, managed by English Heritage, explains the transition from the legionary fortress – established during the conquest of the Welsh borderlands – to the development of the *civitas* capital during the later first century CE.

The monumental features available for visitors to inspect at Roman towns largely remain those that were first protected and displayed during the early- to mid-twentieth century when perceptions of Roman urbanism were rather different.[6] Town walls, features that projected the status of the urban community, are by far the most commonly displayed remains and include some well-preserved and impressive examples (at Caerwent, Chichester, Colchester and Lincoln). The next most common category is that of amphitheatres, theatres and circuses (at Chichester, Cirencester, Colchester, Dorchester, London and Verulamium). Bathhouses, temples and the remains of a market hall and forum

building are also included. By contrast, remains of houses are relatively rarely displayed, although five sites include buildings with mosaic and tessellated floors or hypocausts. Tessellated floors and hypocausts are features of relatively high-status Roman urban houses.

Museums that feature the history of Roman towns across southern Britain often highlight mosaic floors since these are impressive features for visitors. The Museum of London, for example, before it closed (to be moved to a new location and now to be known as London Museum), displayed a prominent reconstruction of the dining room of a high-status house. This room was floored with a reproduction of the Bucklersbury mosaic and decorated with ornate painted plaster and appropriate furniture and fittings. Polm (2016, 232–3) commented that many visitors to this Roman gallery might not realise that they were viewing: 'a very specific and small part of life and culture in Roman Britain' – one that focuses upon the urban elite. This comment also reflects critically upon the displays of the Roman past at many ancient monuments and museums across Britain.

Many of the urban houses revealed by excavation in Roman Britain were far less substantial and elaborate than the example that produced the Bucklersbury floor and did not include features such as mosaics. In London, for example, archaeological excavations have uncovered the timber remains of houses of relatively poor urban dwellers (Hingley 2018). Such buildings leave ephemeral traces – and it is not surprising that the displayed remains at ancient monuments focus on the higher-status houses since these are simpler to conserve, have long been displayed and are far more likely to impress the public.

Some agencies and trusts that display Roman towns have explored the lives of less wealthy urban dwellers. At Caerwent, shops that were probably occupied by less privileged families are displayed alongside the fragmentary remains of three courtyard houses (Brewer 2006). At the Roman town of Wroxeter, an urban Roman townhouse was reconstructed in 2010 to give visitors an impression of how some urban dwellers lived, including the tenant of the householder (Chapter 3). Some museums have started to emphasise the elite focus of much of the material culture that they place on display. At Verulamium, the onsite museum markets itself by emphasising that it focuses on 'everyday life in Roman Britain'. According to their website: 'Built on the site of one of the largest Roman cities in Britain, Verulamium Museum is filled with ancient treasures and some of the finest mosaics outside of the Mediterranean' (Verulamium Museum n.d.). The highly impressive mosaic floors and the extensive areas of painted wall plaster from the elite residences in the town

dominate the displays. The museum displays also explore everyday life by focusing on traders and industries that employed some less wealthy townspeople.

In the recently redisplayed Roman gallery at the Corinium Museum (Cirencester), there is a strenuous effort to supplement the truly impressive mosaic floors with plentiful displays of the life of the less wealthy (Corinium Museum 2023). Including a reconstruction of part of one of the strip houses from the Roman *civitas* capital, the supporting text reads:

> The various types of domestic buildings found in Corinium reflect not only the increasing sophistication of the town but also demonstrate the differences in wealth between the richest and poorest inhabitants.
>
> The wealthiest members of society built increasingly elaborate houses in stone … The poorer members of society had to make do with simple two-roomed timber-framed structures without the elaborate decoration or central heating systems.

These venues aim to complicate the powerful idea of Roman-period elite living and progress under Roman rule by focusing on a perspective that communicates that life for many was not so privileged.[7] The London Museum is currently moving to a new site to reopen in 2026 and early indications are that the Roman displays will also take a more challenging perspective to the past.[8]

Villas

The publicly accessible sites also include Roman villas in the care of English Heritage at Great Whitcombe (Gloucestershire), Lullingstone (Kent) and North Leigh (Oxfordshire). The villa at North Leigh, uncovered in 1813–6 and again during the early twentieth century, was an extensive late Roman courtyard house with several impressive mosaics. An Iron Age and early Roman settlement preceded this villa (Heritage Gateway 2012). The villa at Lullingstone was acquired as a guardianship monument in 1958 following extensive excavations. One of the best preserved and most impressive villas in Britain, Lullingstone includes spectacular mosaics, a bathing structure and a small house-church that indicates the worship of Christianity in Roman Britain (English Heritage n.d.f). Regarding Lullingstone, it is noted by English Heritage on the internet that:

> The particularly fine villa … was rather different: although it has a large barn, there is little evidence of other farm buildings, and it may not have belonged to a farming family. Carved marble busts found there of Publius Helvius Pertinax, governor of Britain in AD 185–6, and his father, suggest that Lullingstone may have been the governor's country residence.
>
> The link with Pertinax serves to emphasise that, while some villas may have been the homes of successful farming families – some of whom were probably descended from pre-Roman noble families – others were associated with those at the top of Romano-British society. These were people of great wealth and power.

Other trusts and agencies display the remains of extensive and elaborate villas, the most impressive of which are the first century 'palace' at Fishbourne and the late Roman villas at Chedworth and Bignor. These elaborate stone-built country houses include mosaics and bathhouses that illustrate the country life of the Roman elite. The impressive courtyard villa at Bignor was discovered and excavated during the early nineteenth century. These excavations uncovered extensive remains, including several mosaic floors. Brick buildings constructed to protect the remains during the early nineteenth century are incorporated into the display of the site today. Chedworth is almost equally impressive and is managed and displayed by the National Trust. Also excavated by the Victorians, this villa has several surviving mosaic pavements. The website for Chedworth (National Trust n.d.) observes:

> Discover the remains of one of the grandest Roman villas in Britain. Walk along the suspended walkways to see some of the most impressive in-situ Roman mosaics in the country, as well as hypocaust systems and bath-houses. Step inside the museum to discover a range of finds and artefacts from the villa, find out more about Britain's Roman past, and soak up the views of the surrounding Cotswold countryside.

The discovery and excavation of Fishbourne Roman Palace (West Sussex) in 1961–9 helped generate considerable public interest in Roman heritage (Cunliffe 1971). The site was protected and displayed for the public by the Sussex Archaeological Society, which runs a small onsite museum. This palace is a particularly elaborate example of a Mediterranean-style villa and must have belonged to an important individual, perhaps the friendly king Togidubnus. The highly elaborate

architecture and mosaics at Fishbourne, Chedworth, Bignor and Brading clearly illustrate the lifestyles of the Roman elite.

There have been attempts made to counter the elite focus provided by these villas. English Heritage provides information on the internet about 'Country Estates in Roman Britain' (English Heritage n.d.g). This website gives a balanced view of the significance and importance of the villas. It emphasises that the lavish villas often developed from simpler houses, perhaps indicating the rise of wealthy farming families from local backgrounds. The presence of servants and slaves is also acknowledged. Excavation and conservation practices, however, mean that little trace of the agricultural buildings is viable at the villa sites displayed to the public. The Victorian and later excavators focused on uncovering the monumental parts of these building complexes, not the agricultural and non-elite elements.

The scarce rural settlements

The settlements at Carn Euny and Chysauster and the two hutcircle settlements on Anglesey (Wales) continued in occupation during the Roman period. These represent the only non-villa settlements held in care by English Heritage, Cadw and HES. The information provided by English Heritage on the internet for the village of courtyard houses at Chysauster is valuable in communicating a very different way of life to that of the Roman military, the urban dwellers and villa owners. It explains that when the Romans invaded Britain, Iron Age communities had to adapt to a new world, shifting to urban living and a monetary economy – although life in the south-west, including at Chysauster, continued substantially unchanged (English heritage n.d.d).

The only additional settlement made accessible to and interpreted for the public by other trusts and agencies is the hillfort at Castell Henllys (Dyfed), where several roundhouses were reconstructed on top of the original foundations of the buildings from which their plans derived (Chapter 3). This settlement, first established during the Iron Age, continued throughout the Roman period. The interpretation of the archaeological remains and reconstructed buildings on this site focuses on living history – this is as much an open-air museum as an ancient monument. It is one of only a few sites, including Chysauster, which spans the Iron Age–Roman divide. Castell Henllys provides a different perspective into the Roman occupation of western Britain to the forts and fortresses, addressed by a Roman legionary re-enactor onsite during Kate Sharpe's visit (Chapter 6).

Elite bias in the countryside

The general absence of lower-status rural settlements among the sites made available to visitors may present school groups and members of the public with the impression that only wealthy people with their houses (including mosaics and bathhouses) and Roman soldiers lived in Britannia, with (perhaps) the occasional slave or freed slave. The population of Roman Britain has been estimated, mainly based on the density of settlement, to have been around 1,600,000 people – and the majority lived in the countryside (Mattingly 2006, 356). These calculations suggest that the Roman garrison was no more than 3 per cent of the population. The towns (including London, Verulamium and the *civitas* capitals) might have had a combined population of around 250,000. These figures indicate the rural population amounted to as much as 80 per cent of the people in the province. The number of people who owned and occupied lavish villas was limited (Smith et al. 2016, 44–5). Most buildings, on farms and in nucleated rural settlements, were far less complex and highly variable in form.

English Heritage is fully aware of the bias and provides an online source titled 'Romans: Landscape' that outlines the highly managed and heavily settled nature of the landscape that the Romans encountered during the invasion and the villages and towns that developed along the Roman roads (English Heritage n.d.h).

> Travelers along the roads between towns would have seen clusters of traditional British roundhouses. These would have been increasingly interspersed, or replaced as the years went by, with the white plaster rendering and re-tiled roofs of villas, as landowners built Mediterranean-style farmhouses.

The same organisation's 'An Introduction to Roman Britain' (English Heritage n.d.i) observes:

> Life for most ordinary Britons, who were farmers in the countryside, was slow to change. By degrees, however, they came into contact with villas, towns and markets. Here they could exchange their products for Roman-style goods and see people dressed in and behaving in Roman ways.

In contrast to the proliferation of reconstructed Iron Age roundhouses at open-air museums, Roman urban or rural buildings

have rarely been reconstructed to communicate that not all the people in southern Britain lived in villas (see Chapter 3).

Dualities and monuments

Almost all the ancient monuments reviewed above were acquired many decades ago when interpretations of the ancient pasts were quite different. They are a powerful resource for teachers and archaeologists as they provide places that help inform pupils, students and the public about the Iron Age and the Roman periods. In addition, the reinterpretation of these sites in the information made available to the public has helped to communicate changed archaeological understandings of the ancient past. At issue here, however, are the binaries that continue to characterise the portrayal of these pasts.

The Iron Age ancient monuments displayed to the public mainly emphasise the idea of a defensive and unsettled Iron Age. This interpretation has come into conflict over the past half century with a growing emphasis at open-air museums on a settled and egalitarian Iron Age (explored in detail in Chapter 3). As a result of changing archaeological interpretations, the information provided for visitors to Iron Age hillforts, *oppida* and brochs has been revised to emphasise the idea of Iron Age people as relatively settled, but in need of occasional defence from attack.

The ancient monuments help to communicate the 'Romans' as either soldiers and their followers in forts or wealthy estate owners living in villas and towns. Meanwhile, the research focus of archaeologists has shifted attention over the past four decades to the variety of experiences of the people of Roman Britain (Hingley 2021b). Some museums have shifted their interpretations to focus on the lives of the less wealthy urban dwellers. Other museums address the variable identities of the military communities that occupied forts and fortresses. Interpretations of Britain's ancient past in the future may well build on such nuanced perspectives that can also be used to further inform school teaching across Britain.

Attitudes to the Romans differ across the regions and nations that constitute the UK. The attitude that the Romans were a force for the civilisation of Iron Age people has more currency in southern England than in the north and west of the British Isles. The Romans are often considered to have been invaders and colonists in Scotland, Wales and Cornwall. Either interpretation draws a direct contrast between the Iron

Age peoples of Britain and succeeding Roman-period populations. At a few of the open-air museums the interaction between Iron Age and Roman-period populations is explored, but in general the Iron Age and Roman pasts seem to be communicated as distinctly unconnected at the majority of the ancient sites reviewed in this chapter.

Having explored the ancient monuments available to visit across Britain, the next chapter addresses open-air museums and other reconstructed places. These venues counter the Romanocentric bias in the ancient monuments displayed to the public by emphasising the Iron Age past. However, they also contribute to the insistent dualties that characterise perceptions of Iron Age and Roman Britain.

Notes

1 http://doi.org/10.15128/r19c67wm84v.
2 http://doi.org/10.15128/r19c67wm84v.
3 The London Museum, which was previously known as the Museum of London, is currently closed and being moved to a new site.
4 Hillforts in Scotland are often also titled '*oppida*', but this name is restricted in this volume to the Late Iron Age sites of southern Britain.
5 Military sites include those listed under 'communication' since the Roman military is thought to have been responsible for building these structures. For the ancient monuments that fall into two categories (e.g. military and religion), a half score has been recorded for each to create the information for Tables 2.2 and 2.3.
6 This information derives from the author's visits to many of these sites and from research on the internet. Some Roman urban features may have been missed.
7 There has also been a welcome trend at several museums to feature the available information for people from other parts of the Roman world who settled in Britain (Eckardt and Müldner 2016, 215; Hingley 2021a, 253–4).
8 Rebecca Redfern, personal communication, April 2024.

3

Building a better yesterday? Reconstructing places

> A Taiwanese dissertation student said … 'Preservation is not about building a better yesterday', but in one way she was wrong. We deal with yesterday's buildings but we do not want yesterday's discomforts and lack of hygiene; in fact … a better yesterday is what we want.
>
> (McCallum 2007, 34).

Introduction: popular roundhouses

This chapter explores how, when archaeological remains are absent, reconstructed and reimagined places (often titled open-air museums) fulfil the role of transporting visitors through time and evoking strong personal connections with the past worlds (an issue pursued further in Part II). These venues provide a range of tangible experiences of the ancient past. One remarkable development explored here is how, since the 1970s, the architecture form of the reconstructed Iron Age roundhouse has impacted upon the public.

A comment on the internet from Rotunda Roundhouse (2022a), one of several building firms that offer to build roundhouses for clients, illustrates this:

> As 2022 rolls in, we feel so proud to recognise how magnificent it is, that the Roundhouse is now rooting itself back into our civilisation – taking hold in the UK as the preferred style of building for many schools, nurseries, homeowners and retreat operators in the UK. At Rotunda Roundhouses, we feel it a privilege to revive

this form of architecture across the UK and as we look forward to 2022, we look back to the wonderful year of 2021.

The popularity of roundhouse construction shows that these buildings have become emblematic of Iron Age living as part of a conception of the ancient past as a more environmentally sustainable community than our current age. This perception was developed and projected in the early phase of the fashion for rebuilding Iron Age roundhouses from the 1970s and has blossomed and transformed since.

In the terms explored in the chapter title, those who reconstruct roundhouses aim to build a better yesterday – one that sidelines the negative aspects of living in the ancient past (McCallum 2007, 34). This chapter is concerned with how this situation came about and why some people favour the idea of life in a roundhouse. Media presentations, after all, often emphasise the lavish buildings constructed in Roman Britain, which are rather more akin to the housing aspirations of many today's wealthy individuals.

Definitions: open-air museums and reconstructed buildings

Some reconstructed roundhouses are exhibited at institutions titled 'open-air museums'. Others have been built by community groups and as part of school initiatives. The venues titled open-air museums are highly diverse in origin and purpose and include several significant examples in Britain that have a prime focus on the Iron Age. The European Exchange on Archaeological Research and Communication (EXARC) defines an open-air museum as: 'a non-profit permanent institution with outdoor true-to-scale architectural reconstructions primarily based on archaeological sources' (EXARC n.d.).

Open-air museums include the Ancient Technology Centre, the Peat Moors Centre (now closed), the Scottish Crannog Centre, Butser Ancient Farm and the Shakespeare Globe Centre (Paardekooper 2013, 54–5). Most open-air museums were constructed and opened after 1980 and relatively few have been established in the past three decades (Paardekooper 2013, 96–7). All periods of the past are reconstructed at open-air museums across Europe. The popularity of particular periods may relate to the origin myths of nations, as is shown by the focus on the Middle Ages across Scandinavia, where many centres focus on the Vikings (Paardekooper 2013, 100–1). Paardekooper observes that in the British Isles, there are 'frequent depictions' of the Iron Age, a comment that our research supports.

The term 'reconstructed building' is adopted here since the concept of the 'construction' of an ancient-style structure implies a spurious degree of certainty. These buildings are constructed according to the information obtained about ancient structures through archaeological excavations, although a significant degree of interpretation and guesswork is required. The buildings can also be reconstructed a second time following new insights derived from both archaeological excavations and the results of systematic experimental archaeology (Paardekooper 2013, 28–9). Archaeologists make efforts in such reconstructions to convince visitors that the buildings have some form of archaeological veracity through the methods of experimental archaeology. Most of these buildings have been reconstructed on sites well away from archaeological remains. Archaeology policy dictates that reconstructions should not be built directly on top of ancient structures.

Peter Reynolds' highly influential work at Butser Ancient Farm in the late 1970s, explored in detail below, was an influential example of an approach to experimental archaeology comparable to a concept that has (more recently) been termed 'material authenticity'. Material authenticity and experimental archaeology focus on the tangible aspects of heritage, including the physical relics of Iron Age roundhouses and the artefacts and ecofacts preserved with them (Penrose 2020, 1249). As well as relating to the original objects and structures, material authenticity explores the processes involved in the social production/creation of artefacts and structures, exploring how things came into being as entities and how they worked through experimentation.

Iron Age and Roman reconstructions

Our research drew upon published information, word of mouth and the internet to locate sites at which roundhouses and later-prehistoric-style houses have been reconstructed. We identified 65 sites with one or more full-sized reconstructions, with the first built in 1934 and the most recent in 2021 (Figures 3.1 and 3.2; Online Data Table 4[1]).[2] These figures do not include roundhouses that are not full-scale or the reconstructions of such buildings indoors that form part of museum displays. This list will not be complete, but it does provide an idea of the spread of the fashion for constructing such buildings. Many of these buildings are recorded in their descriptions online as intending to reconstruct Iron Age houses, although quite a few are identified as Bronze Age or even Neolithic. For example, Bronze Age reconstructions at Flag Fen (Cambridgeshire, England) and Trewortha (Cornwall, England) were based on the remains

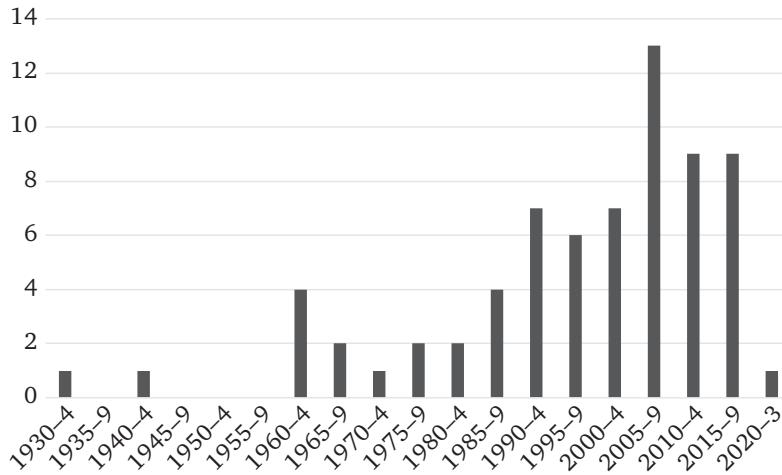

Figure 3.1 Chart showing the date at which the first later prehistoric houses were reconstructed at sites (showing number of sites on the y axis). © Richard Hingley.

of roundhouses close to these sites and the inspirations for the houses at the open-air museum at Brigantium (Northumberland, England) derived from a nearby Roman-period settlement (Frodsham 2004, 59–60). A few of these houses are not entirely round (see Online Data Table 4).

At some of these places, a single roundhouse has been reconstructed and, at others, multiple examples form 'villages'. New structures have replaced the original roundhouses at several longer-lived venues (including Butser Ancient Farm and Castell Henllys). Some of these roundhouses were abandoned long ago and have collapsed, leaving no traces. For example, at Archaeolink, an open-air museum has closed. Several well-established open-air museums were established as Iron Age centres with roundhouse reconstructions. Most have diversified to include buildings to represent other periods of the ancient past. Educational and community projects have also constructed roundhouses to inform children about the Iron Age and sustainable living. In addition, several eco-centres include reconstructed roundhouses. It is also possible to rent such buildings as holiday homes in three locations.

The places at which Roman-period buildings have been reconstructed are almost entirely different. Our research located 15 sites – two of which are settlements of Iron Age-style roundhouses occupied during the Roman period (see Online Data Table 5). These reconstructions have been built since the 1960s and there are several recent examples (Figure 3.3). The other 13 Roman reconstructions are far more variable

Figure 3.2 Map showing reconstructed later prehistoric houses in Britain. This shows venues at which later prehistoric houses have been constructed (single period) and also other venues at which the later prehistoric houses are accompanied by reconstructions of buildings of other historical periods (multiperiod). Drawn by Christina Unwin.

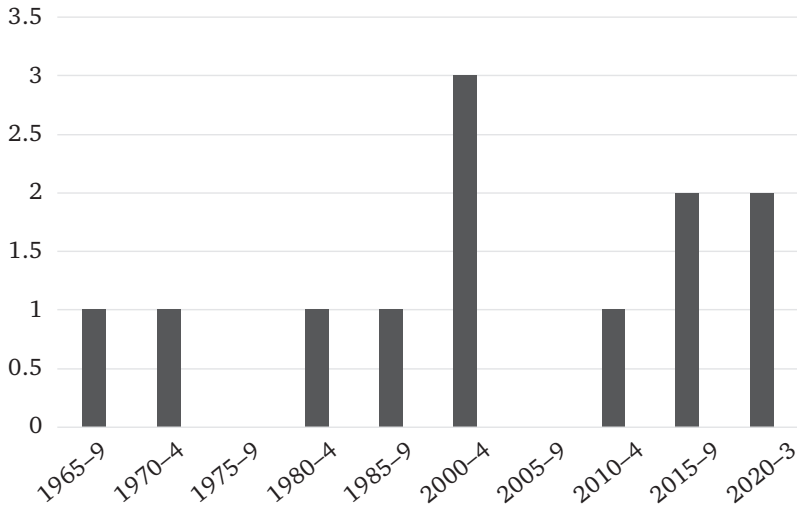

Figure 3.3 Chart showing the date at which the first Roman reconstructions were built at sites (showing number of sites on the y axis). © Richard Hingley.

and include structural elements of forts (ramparts, gateways and internal buildings), one townhouse, two villa buildings, one villa dining room and a forge. Many of these structures and buildings have been reconstructed to supplement the visitor facilities at ancient monuments of Roman date, although six (including one site that has closed) are located well away from the remains of ancient monuments. Of these, three have been built at open-air museums that display buildings from different periods.

The Iron Age and Roman reconstructions fulfil different purposes. We now consider how the fashion for reconstructing Iron Age buildings came about.

Why the roundhouse?

Paardekooper (2013, 100–1) suggests that in Scotland and Wales, as in Germany, the predominance of Iron Age reconstructions may have to do with an association between this period of the past and national myths of origin. Associations between reconstructed roundhouses and the 'Celtic' past seem relatively common in Wales from the data (Online Data Table 4). Such an association appears less likely for England (excluding Cornwall), where (traditionally) people have often drawn upon a Germanic (or Anglo-Saxon) myth to imagine their origins (Ellard 2019;

Williams 2013). The prime reason for the popularity of roundhouse reconstructions in southern Britain relates to the impact of archaeology and the media since the mid-1970s.

Roundhouses, the dominant building type throughout Britain during later prehistory, were constructed with various materials, including timber, earth and stone (Harding 2009). Deriving from a long architectural tradition that commenced during the Bronze Age, such buildings were common during the Iron Age and in the Roman period (Smith et al. 2016, 47–51). This structural type has become emblematic of the British Iron Age and has a considerable visual impact (Harding 2009, 14–26; Reynolds 1979, 29). The work of Peter Reynolds during the 1970s at Butser Ancient Farm established the roundhouse as an Iron Age icon. A comparison is often made between prehistoric roundhouses and structures found in traditional African settings (Reynolds 1993, 93–4), leading to an association between the idea of living in the past and non-Western lifestyles.

Harold Mytum (2003, 96–7) suggests that the concept of the Iron Age as 'other' for visitors to museums and heritage venues is established through the physical experience of reconstructed roundhouses. There is an interesting circularity in this framing of 'otherness'. Initially, the reconstructions were intended to communicate the Iron Age in this way. The methodology for the reconstruction of such buildings, deriving primarily from the work of Reynolds, has, however, ensured that these buildings have perpetuated and substantiated the sense of their 'otherness' (see Hill 1989). The rate of construction of roundhouses during the final 25 years of the twentieth century has made the concept of Iron Age life much more familiar to people in Britain and construction has declined from a peak in 2005–9 (Figure 3.1). Could this be a result of the increasing proliferation of these structures and the relative standardisation of the concept of the Iron Age, which has gradually made it seem less unfamiliar? Half a century of reconstruction, it would appear, has helped build the idea of a more familiar Iron Age.

The Iron Age as 'other': the first roundhouse reconstructions

Knowledge of later prehistoric building types developed during the early twentieth century as archaeologists gradually came to recognise timber buildings. The excavation of the well-preserved Iron Age timber buildings at the 'Glastonbury Lake Village' (Somerset) at the turn of the twentieth century produced a range of artefacts that helped to document the sophistication of craft production, as archaeological research started

to challenge the inherited ideas of a primitive and barbaric Iron Age (Phillips 2005, 79).

The earliest reconstruction drew inspiration from the Glastonbury excavations and from the building of Iron Age-style houses in Germany during the 1930s. The so-called 'Neolithic Lake Dwelling' at the remarkable Abbey Falls Folk Park (New Barnet, London) was opened to the public in 1934 (Ginn 2009). This park contained a substantial and eclectic collection of antiquities, religious artworks and historical curiosities assembled by Father John Ward, a maverick collector and eccentric cleric. Presumably, his lake dwelling was modelled on the Iron Age examples from Glastonbury.

Excavation methodologies improved from the 1940s onward. It gradually became apparent that Iron Age societies in southern Britain could not have been in a constant state of warfare, as suggested by the texts of Caesar and Tacitus. The idea of a more settled society drew inspiration from the excavation of the Iron Age settlement at Little Woodbury (Wiltshire) by Gerhard Bersu in 1938–9 (Bersu 1940). Bersu uncovered several structures during an extensive and professional excavation, including a complex and substantial timber roundhouse. He argued that the large number of storage pits indicated the mixed farming economy of this community and the importance of arable agriculture (Bersu 1940, 100–1). Discussing how to reconstruct this impressive roundhouse, based on the post holes for the timber uprights of the building, Bersu noted the potential of 'ethnographic parallels', quoting potential analogies, including 'earth-lodges' and 'dirt-lodges' in North America (Bersu 1940, 90). Emphasising the growing information for the distribution of settlements across southern Britain, deriving from aerial photography, Bersu observed that hillforts were a minor element that lent the Iron Age a 'warlike aspect' that it had not possessed (Bersu 1940, 107).

A BBC programme titled *The Beginning of History* (1944) aimed to introduce school children to British prehistory and to 'raise some imaginations to a greater awareness of the fantastic wonder of human history' (Hawkes 1946, 82; Finn 2000). Jacquetta Hawkes, who played a significant role in the production, commented on the limitations of the information available for the appearance of people and their customs during prehistory, drawing upon 'field monuments, museum specimens, animated maps and diagrams and simple reconstructions' (Hawkes 1946, 79). One 'ambitious' reconstruction was featured, a life-size model of the Iron Age farm at Little Woodbury built at Pinewood Studios (Iver, Buckinghamshire; Hawkes 1946, 82; see Harding 2009,

34–5; Townend 2002, 74). A photograph shows a squat, straw-roofed structure surrounded by a palisade with accompanying farm animals. The building, constructed with a 'rude appearance', had 'no architectural pretensions' (Hawkes 1946, 82). Although no people are visible in the photograph, the Iron Age farm included storage pits for grain, granaries, goats, Soay sheep, a sheepdog and some New Forest ponies.

Into the modern age: Peter Reynolds

The excavation of Iron Age settlements across southern Britain in the decades following Bersu's pioneering work led to an increasing emphasis on agriculture and settled living (Cunliffe 1974). Reynolds was heavily influenced by this, observing that the information from many excavated Iron Age settlements indicated that communities lived a more settled life than had previously been proposed (Reynolds 1979, 9–10). In 1966, he undertook the reconstruction of an 'Iron Age hut', based on a small building from the Glastonbury Lake Village, at Bredon Hill (Worcestershire) on a site 50 yards to the south of the Iron Age hillfort (Reynolds 1967). The hut was constructed by pupils from Prince Henry's Grammar School, Evesham, where Reynolds taught classics.

Reynolds was then asked to reconstruct an Iron Age farm at the Avoncroft Museum of Buildings (Bromsgrove, Worcestershire; Reynolds 1969). This farmstead, with two roundhouses and an enclosing bank and ditch, was modelled on a small Iron Age settlement recently excavated at Tollard Royal (Wiltshire; Wainwright 1968). Reynolds used the information derived from the excavation of Iron Age roundhouses at Conderton (Worcestershire) and Maiden Castle as a basis for the two buildings (Reynolds 1969; Reynolds 1983, 190–7). Experiments in spinning, weaving, ploughing, sowing and reaping of crops linked the reconstructions to a developing fashion for experimental archaeology.

Reynolds moved on to found the 'Iron-Age Farm' at Butser, established in 1972 as a centre for research and education. Butser became one of the earliest and best-known examples of a new kind of heritage venue (Reynolds 1979; Reynolds 1999; see Stone and Planel 1999, 4). The high profile of Roman Britain in the school curriculum and society in general must have been behind Reynolds' initiative. The ancient monuments and museums across England provided a prominent conception of Roman military settlement across the frontiers and the civilisation of the south (Chapter 2). The discovery and excavation of Fishbourne Roman Palace (West Sussex) in 1961–9 created considerable additional public interest in Roman heritage (Cunliffe 1971), while

the first Roman re-enactment group, the Ermine Street Guard, was established in 1972 (Chapter 4). Butser helped to provide an entirely different picture of the ancient past.

Another direct inspiration was the research centre at 'Land of Legends' at Lejra in Denmark (Research Committee on Ancient Agriculture 1970, 10). Land of Legends, which opened in 1964, was designed as an experiment in which visitors were invited to live in Iron Age reconstructed houses as a means of helping archaeologists to interpret the past (Brædder et al. 2017, 178–81; Holtorf 2014, 784). The intention was to understand Iron Age life based on ethnographic experiments with families recruited to live at Lejra for short periods.

Reynolds adopted a far more material methodology at Butser, focusing on reconstructing buildings and economies without introducing experiments based on living people. He intended to explore the way of life of traditional farming communities through reconstruction and experimentation. The idea of a warrior-dominated Iron Age was to give way to a focus on agricultural production and communal living. Reynolds' scientific emphasis derived from experimental archaeology and the testing of hypotheses (Reynolds 1979, 13–17; Reynolds 1999, 127–9). Butser became the best-known of the British centres for experimental archaeology during the first two decades of its existence (Paardekooper 2013, 46; Stone and Planel 1999, 4; Townend 2007, 149). As well as relating to the original objects and structures recovered through excavation, this approach addressed the processes involved in the social production/creation of artefacts and structures, exploring how things came into being as entities and how they worked through experimentation (see Penrose 2020, 1249).

Reynolds discussed the idea of using ethnographic parallels, mentioning that the Butser reconstructions could look very much like a range of structures found in Africa, but also noting a concern that the environmental issues and factors of 'social organization and tradition' made any comparison between Iron Age and African houses irrelevant (Reynolds 1993, 93–4). Reynolds' philosophy was that data is required to reconstruct the ancient past but that, in the absence of information, the only reliable way to document the past is through experimental methods that can be tested. The main elements of Iron Age roundhouses were above ground, although often only the bases of post holes and features of the house that extended into the ground survived. The reconstructions were based on the information provided by well-excavated Iron Age houses and monitored to determine how well the built structures survived through time. The first reconstructed examples at Butser

included a roundhouse based on an excavated ground plan from the Iron Age hillfort at Maiden Castle (Dorset) and another derived from Baulksbury (Hampshire; Reynolds 1979, 30–45).

Reynolds also aimed to find evidence for the most appropriate types of crops and animals with which to stock the 'Iron Age Farm', drawing upon the faunal and floral remains found during excavation. The presence of animals at Butser drew upon their use at other open-air museums across Europe. It also helped to encourage visits from families with children (Paardekooper 2013, 65–6). The emphasis on the idea that Iron Age farming communities lived within the constraints of the environment was to prove highly influential.

The 'science' of reconstruction at Butser left little room for any creative conceptions of the 'otherness' of the Iron Age. Reynolds (1999, 126–9) emphasised that 'living in the past' formed no part of his work. He viewed the Iron Age as a distant period. The archaeological task was to reconstruct and interpret whatever remained through analytical methodology. This experimental philosophy had a significant impact upon other open-air museums – for instance, at the Scottish Crannog Centre (Perthshire), where a full-sized crannog was reconstructed in the years after 1986 (Barrie and Dixon 2007).

This methodology at Butser involved 'no thought of playing at being Iron-Age people' (Reynolds 1979, 14). Reynolds observed:

> Any attempt to relive the remote past is destined to failure, because the knowledge and experience of previous generations are denied us. To place modern man into a prehistoric context, given the limitations of our knowledge, is only to observe how modern people may react both to the conditions and to each other.

A BBC TV series screened early in the history of the development of the open-air museum at Butser pursued a very different approach to the Iron Age.

John Percival and 'Living in the Past'

Living in the Past was broadcast in 1977 and was a historical recreation of life in the Iron Age staged at a purpose-built 'Iron Age village' at Tollard Royal (Wiltshire). Its producer and mastermind, John Percival, had undertaken a degree in Archaeology and Anthropology at Sidney Sussex College (Cambridge) before turning to the production of TV programmes (Percival 2005). The idea for this series of 12 programmes, which drew

an audience of around 18 million, derived from his passion for anthropology and a desire to find alternatives to the mass-consumer society of 1970s Britain.

Percival was determined to develop a successful series and decided to be creative. In his book on this television project, Percival mentioned that the reconstruction of the Iron Age houses at Butser and Land of Legends inspired his approach, noting that every year, a few families were invited to stay in Iron Age houses at Lejra for a few weeks (Percival 1980, 9). Experimentation formed a significant element of his motivation, although Percival's concept of experimental archaeology differed from Reynolds' approach in that it involved living people interacting with a reconstructed Iron Age settlement.

A group of volunteers, including 12 young adults and three children, were recruited through an advert in *The Times* and installed at Tollard Royal to build and then live in the Iron Age village (Percival 1980, 10–12). Four buildings were reconstructed in an area with plentiful remains of prehistoric settlement. The large roundhouse was a home for all the villagers, while a pigsty, hen house and small roundhouse were also constructed (based on structures excavated at Glastonbury Lake Village; Percival 1980, 19–21). The volunteers aimed to live as 'Iron Age' farmers for a year in wattle and daub houses. Dressed in 'authentic' 'Iron Age' costumes, they were to consume food that they produced (Duguid n.d.; Stone and Planel 1999, 4). Percival pioneered his approach by involving the archaeologists willing to help and then by leaving the volunteers alone with crops and livestock in the reconstructed Iron Age settlement, with regular visits from the television unit (Percival 1980, 10).

The TV series documented the problems experienced by this community and their activities, including a re-enactment of a pagan festival that involved the erection and burning of a substantial 15-foot-tall wicker man (Percival 1980, 43–8, 124–6). Robin Hardy's cult horror film, *The Wicker Man*, had been released in 1973, four years before the filming of *Living in the Past*. The final scene of *The Wicker Man* involves the burning of a visiting policeman in a giant straw man, a scene loosely based upon an account of druidic worship written by Julius Caesar (*de Bello Gallico* VI, 13–18).

The popularity of *Living in the Past* with many of its viewers explains its significant influence on succeeding generations, relating to the interesting play that existed in the 'village' between the strange and familiar. This stemmed, at least in part, from a sense of the familiarity of the ancient past that the programme engendered for many viewers. Tom Yarrow recalls that his grandmother absolutely loved this programme

which often caused her to comment that 'they were just like us'.[3] Yarrow observes that this feeling of kinship derived from a sense of common humanity that drew upon the perceived universality of domestic situations and circumstances, as documented by this production. Some viewers interpreted the action differently. Peter Fowler (1992, 16–17) observed that the wide public interest in the programmes was focused on the 'social dynamics of these people', including scenes of nudity, rather than upon the experimental aspects of the project. He noted that the 'flaw' in *Living in the Past* was the participants who 'bore little resemblance to Iron Age farmers in their individual and group psychologies'.

Mark Duguid (n.d.) commented that the handmade clothes of the participants, their shaggy hair and leather jewellery made them 'almost impossible to distinguish from the hippies' of the current age. At this time, some people across Britain and the West adopted alternative lifestyles to challenge authority because of growing concerns about environmental degradation – the so-called 'ecological turn' of the 1970s (Engels 2010, 120–8). Percival had attempted to encourage archaeologists to advise the team involved in the production about how to live in an Iron Age style, although Reynolds only provided guidance on the physical structures and the agricultural background (Percival 1980, 9).

Despite this, Reynolds (1999, 134) *was* aware of the potential value of the 'spiritual aura of the Iron Age' to attract the public.[4] He noted that the large roundhouse at Butser was occasionally used for concerts of 'Celtic music and poetry', commenting that the sound of the Celtic harp within the house is 'especially haunting and emotive', an appeal to a past that is both close and distant. These celebrations were intended to encourage the public to take an interest in Butser and had little to do with the experimental science that formed the core aim.

The agenda for display and performance at open-air museums has transformed considerably during the decades since the broadcasting of *Living in the Past*. The current philosophy for these centres casts a positive light upon Percival's series of programmes (see Holtorf 2014, 784–5), which predicted some issues explored in recent accounts of 'experiential authenticity'. Experiential authenticity is related to 'performative' or 'existential' authenticity (Penrose 2020, 1248–9; Jin, Xiao and Shen 2020). It is a phenomenological, personal and momentary state of being often inspired by interaction with artefacts, physical (tangible) objects, or processes of experimental analysis. So, the authenticity of an artefact or structure is an outcome of the continuous negotiation of the qualities of the material among audiences that may not entirely be made up of experts. This process requires continuous negotiation within and

among audiences in which the expert may still have some enhanced role. *Living in the Past* was an innovative early example of such an initiative. It seems unfortunate today that Reynolds was unable to supply advice to the villagers on Iron Age life.

Percival and Reynolds made highly significant contributions to the remarkable development of interest in Iron Age living across the UK, driving a new agenda that helped to challenge the prominence of the Roman past in the public mind.

The Iron Age as 'other' in Wales

Wales was to get its own Iron Age open-air museum within a decade of the establishment of Butser. The initial excavation and reconstructions at Castell Henllys commenced in 1981, drawing upon the experience of the team at Butser and the creativity of Percival's TV series. A private individual, an entrepreneur named Hugh Foster, developed Castell Henllys by purchasing the archaeological site to develop it as a tourist attraction (Mytum 1999, 181–2). Information from the archaeological excavation of several Iron Age roundhouses at the site was used to reconstruct the buildings. Castell Henllys, which is now one of the most extensively excavated Iron Age sites in Britain, has witnessed decades of excavation and research by the archaeologist Harold Mytum, whose work is drawn upon extensively below. Foster also used ethnographic parallels to fill in gaps in knowledge (Mytum 1999, 182).

This enclosed settlement was built and occupied during the Iron Age and remained settled until the end of the fourth century CE (Mytum 2013, 17). A small, enclosed settlement containing several roundhouses, Castell Henllys is comparable to many Iron Age sites in this part of Wales (Mytum 1999, 181). This site also has a lengthy and complex modern history of reconstruction from the 1980s to the present. This heritage venue differs from Butser in one fundamental respect – the reconstructed roundhouses are built directly on top of the carefully excavated remains of the original Iron Age structures that inspired them. Archaeologists usually oppose rebuilding archaeological structures on top of the surviving remains of the excavated structure, arguing that no reconstruction can present more than a representation of a past structure, even when based on the best available information (Stone and Planel 1999, 1–2).

The sense of the 'real' is why careful experimental reconstruction has been emphasised by the archaeologists involved in the work at Castell Henllys, Butser and other open-air museums. These centres

have developed a logic of reconstruction that draws upon excavated archaeological information and experimental philosophy to argue for the reliability of the material heritage of Iron Age buildings and the agricultural regimes they practise. Despite the subsequent popularity of reconstructing Iron Age roundhouses in Britain, Castell Henllys is the only site where the houses have been constructed immediately on top of the excavated remains of Iron Age buildings.

Foster bridged the gap between archaeological information and Iron Age life by building on the fashion that associated Iron Age 'villages' with alternative lifestyles. He recruited several people from what Mytum (1999, 184) terms 'self sufficient alternative communities'. They collected reeds, built the houses and helped around the site. Several of these people were interested in mystical religions and traditional agricultural methods. As a result, archaeological evidence and twentieth-century ideas became deeply entangled. Where archaeological information was missing, speculation bridged the gaps, using a creative approach to the 'present as past', eroding the idea of chronological separation (Mytum 2004, 93).

This eclectic approach drew criticism from some archaeologists since many items around the site were considered inappropriate in an Iron Age context (see Ballard 2007, 173). Foster intended to present some of the more dramatic aspects of prehistoric life, emphasising the mystical and martial, in addition to the domestic and agricultural themes that formed the focus at Butser (Mytum 1999, 182). Ritual behaviour was emphasised by placing artefacts around a spring to the north-west of the hillfort and a (fake) human skull in one roundhouse (Mytum 1999, 183). Militaristic aspects of society were emphasised by placing replica weapons in some buildings.

The display of the replica human head raised some concerns (Mytum 1999, 183; Blockley 1999, 23). A changing agenda of archaeological interpretation during the 1990s was distancing interpretations of the Iron Age past from the graphic portrayals of barbarian behaviour included in the classical texts. To counter a previous emphasis on warfare, violence and the display of human heads, the interpretation at Iron Age open-air museums – such as Butser and the Scottish Crannog Centre – sidelined such ideas. The focus on warfare and ritual at Castell Henllys pursued a different agenda.

Foster died in 1991 and the future of the site was uncertain. Harold Mytum (1999, 181, 187) stresses that the perception of the site's 'Celtic' identity was fundamental to its subsequent purchase by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and the resulting investment. The public can visit

large numbers of impressive ancient monuments across Wales, although many are seen to date to periods of external domination by groups of immigrants (including Roman forts, a Roman town and many medieval castles and abbeys). Roman and English conquerors and settlers built many of these monuments (Mytum 1999, 181). By contrast, Iron Age farmsteads and hillforts – sites that predated later invaders – were (and remain) poorly represented in the monuments made available to visitors (Chapter 2). This helped to justify the acquisition of Castell Henllys by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. A comparable emphasis on the medieval monuments built by Welsh princes also led to the excavation of Nevern Castle, close to Castell Henllys, since 2008.[5]

The need for a Welsh educational and cultural centre also helped to justify the acquisition of Castell Henllys by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, since this area is home to local populations of Welsh speakers. The Welsh national curriculum formerly included a core component on 'Life in the Iron Age' for 7–11-year-olds, with an agenda that emphasised the Celtic origins of the Welsh, an interpretation that highlighted the significance of Castell Henllys (Mytum 1999, 199; Rhys 2008, 238). A second 'Celtic village' was opened in 1992 at the National History Museum, St Fagans (Cardiff). This centre actively instructed Welsh school children about the Iron Age, again drawing upon the concept of the Celts (Rhys 2008, 244–5). Although part of a wider Iron Age cultural tradition, the interpretation at Castell Henllys suggested that its inhabitants were 'untainted' by English associations (Mytum 2004, 100). These developments connected to Welsh devolution and nationalism drew upon a Celtic myth of identity that was under criticism from anthropologists and archaeologists during the early 1990s (Chapman 1992). Castell Henllys remains open to the public today. The idea of a local Celtic past was still explored by some guides at the site when we visited (Chapter 6).

Mytum (2004, 92) wrote that the 'romance of the Celtic free spirit' developed by Foster survived the change in ownership, even if it was somewhat toned down in the official activities of conservation and display. The new regime led to the installation of 'more appropriate artefacts' in the houses and partially deconsecrated the site by removing a 'mystic maze' of quartz blocks (Mytum 1999, 191; Mytum 2004, 99). The Pembrokeshire Coast National Park continued to allow and enable the development of the religious focus at the spring on the edge of the site, adding some wooden idols and artefacts (Mytum 2004, 190). Mytum (2013, 24) recalls that this spring became a place of pilgrimage for followers of alternative religions who placed their own votive offerings

Figure 3.4 Photograph of the sacred spring at Castell Henllys. Photographed by Richard Hingley, 2014.

at the feet of the wooden idols and tied pieces of cloth to the surrounding trees. The Pembrokeshire Coast National Park has cleared these items away on several occasions and this sacred site is dynamic and constantly evolving (Figure 3.4).

The new interpretation presents the visitor with a more authoritative product than that conveyed by Foster's Castell Henllys, a 'professionally presented single view' (Mytum 1999, 192). Mytum continued to encourage an emphasis on the 'otherness' of the Iron Age in his work at the site by encouraging the site managers to add 'Celtic art' to the roundhouses, based partly on designs found on Iron Age pottery from Glastonbury (Mytum 2003, 99–100) (Figure 3.5). In addition, a group of volunteers spent seven weeks living at Castell Henllys as part of the BBC TV series, *Surviving the Iron Age* (which was modelled upon *Living in the Past*; Firstbrook 2001). The group experimented by undertaking some druidic rituals alongside agricultural and industrial experiments.

We shall return to Castell Henllys and Butser Ancient Farm in Part II (below).

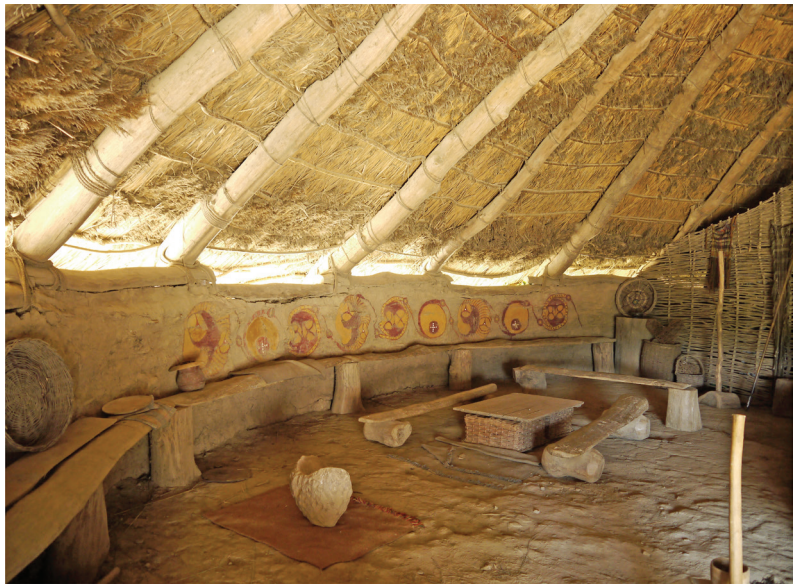

Figure 3.5 Photograph of the interior of one of the roundhouses at Castell Henllys. Photographed by Richard Hingley, 2014.

A sustainable, egalitarian and familiar Iron Age

The information for the number of reconstructed later prehistoric houses indicates that this building fashion has drawn in disparate groups with highly varying ideas and aims, forming a tradition that has lasted for half a century (Figure 3.1). Looking at the chronology of the construction of these roundhouses gives a picture of the gradual spread of the fashion for reconstructing Iron Age living. Indicating a trend that developed considerable momentum during the 1990s and early 2000s, the rate of building has subsequently, perhaps, declined. The recent replacement of the earlier reconstructed roundhouses at Butser, Castell Henllys and St Fagans indicates, however, that the fashion for building Iron Age dwellings may not be declining very much.

These roundhouses occur across much of the UK, with significant concentrations across southern, central and western Britain (Figures 3.2 and 3.6). There is a particular focus in southern England, illustrating the impact of Reynolds' work, since he helped to build roundhouses at several venues. The sustained construction rate throughout the early years of the twenty-first century relates in part to the growing availability of National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) grants for community heritage projects (Chapter 5).

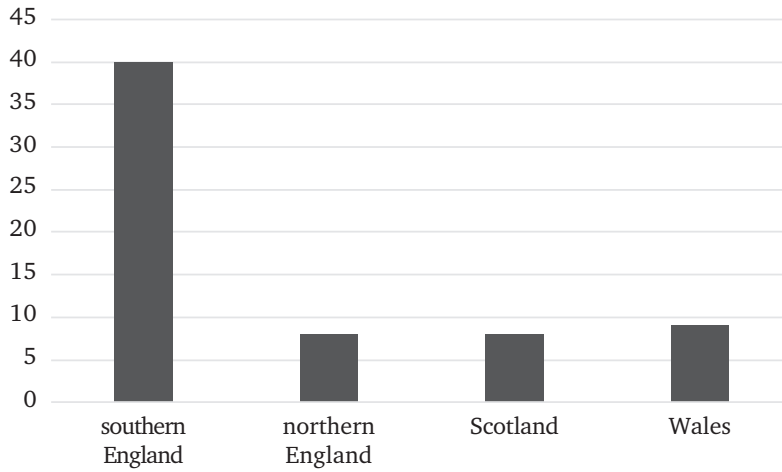

Figure 3.6 Chart showing the number of venues with reconstructed later prehistoric houses in different parts of the UK (showing number of sites on the y axis). Southern England lies south of a line between Liverpool and Hull. © Richard Hingley.

Venues that have reconstructed roundhouses vary from places with a single example to larger-scale open-air museums with reconstructed buildings portraying different periods. The Ancient Technology Centre (Dorset) opened in 1985, with the construction of a roundhouse by a group of supervised school children (Keen 1999). This venue stages living history events involving school children focused on an Iron Age 'earthhouse', an Iron Age roundhouse, a Roman forge, a Roman water-lifting device, a Saxon workshop and a Viking longhouse. Iron Age roundhouses were the initial buildings constructed at several other multiperiod open-air museums.

Most of these reconstructions aim to build upon knowledge derived from excavations, and sometimes they draw on the extant remains of Iron Age roundhouses. The three hut circles at the Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement at Bodrifty (Cornwall, England) inspired the neighbouring reconstructed roundhouse (Nowakowski 2016, 142, 148–9). The reconstructed building at Coire a' Bhradain (Glen Rosa, Arran) drew upon the excavated remains on a nearby excavated Bronze Age roundhouse (Alexander 2020). The open-air museum that formerly existed at Brigantium (Rochester, Northumberland), to the north of Hadrian's Wall, drew upon the name of the Iron Age tribe in this area of Britain and was a reconstruction of a Romano-British 'native' settlement with the information for the ground plan of the buildings derived from a local archaeological site.

The concepts of Iron Age egalitarian living and sustainability championed in *Living in the Past* play a significant role in many of these reconstructions. The Cae Mabon Eco Retreat Centre (Snowdonia, Wales), now over 30 years old, promotes a more spiritual message than most open-air museums (Cae Mabon 2018). It includes a variety of buildings set in an oak forest that it is possible to rent as retreats from the pressures of modern life, including the central 'Celtic roundhouse' and two buildings that draw upon Navaho architecture, a hogan and a lodge. Cae Mabon provides a venue for people to stay and explore alternative and eco-friendly lifestyles. Messages about sustainable living and agriculture tie in with spiritual ideas at several other heritage venues, including Felin Uchaf (Gwynedd, Wales), where a centre for holistic education has developed 'ecostructures' including a 'Celtic roundhouse' and other buildings of various dates (Felin Uchaf n.d.). These are available to rent through Airbnb.

The idea of holidaying in the Iron Age has spread to several other places, perhaps drawing on the Iron Age-inspired open-air museum at Land of Legends, where people have been holidaying since the 1960s (above). The roundhouse at Bodrifty was constructed in 1999 by the farmer and the completion of the project coincided with a televised visit from Channel 4's *Time Team*, which had been excavating a neighbouring Iron Age hillfort (Parker 2000). Writing in *The Guardian*, Georgia Brown described a visit (Brown 2011):

> What better way to get close to Cornwall's ancient history than to enjoy the life of a Celtic chief? … I fancy that this is what you might get if BBC's Changing Rooms paid a visit to the set of the Time Team.

Brown also described a torch-lit walk to the toilet (located in a converted stable block). The need for modern comfort has not extended to providing ensuite facilities within this roundhouse.

The TV coverage of the opening of the Bodrifty roundhouse may have encouraged additional initiatives. The internet advertises the Upcott Roundhouse (Devon) as a venue for a 'unique "truly magical" Iron-age holiday experience'; the 'lands and home of a chieftain of the Dumnonii people' (Upcott Roundhouse 2015). The local Iron Age people (or tribe) – the Dumnonii – is referenced here rather than a generic 'Celtic' identity. The roundhouse is built entirely from natural resources, while the adjoining 'mini roundhouse' contains a compost loo, basin and hot shower. In northern Britain, the roundhouse at Marthrown of

Mabie (Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland) is also advertised online as an 'authentic' replica. It is available for hire for holidays alongside several other buildings, including a tipi and a yurt (Marthrown of Mabie n.d.). This roundhouse sleeps 16 people and has environmentally sensitive toilets and electric lights. There is no need for those who go glamping in these Iron Age roundhouses to suffer discomforts and lack of hygiene.

Environmental sensitivity is evident at other venues with roundhouse reconstructions. The Eceni Study Centre and Permacultural Experience opened in 2010 (ESCAPE 2017). Based around a roundhouse that represented an 'Iron Age farmstead of the Iceni (or Eceni) tribe, dating around AD 60', this venue closed after a year. Permaculture was first developed as an approach to farming in the 1970s by Australians Bill Mollison and David Holmgren, drawing on 'indigenous' agricultural systems. It has become an international movement with projects in over 75 countries (Birnbaum Fox 2010). The Permaculture Association is an online network that connects people and provides learning opportunities (Permaculture Association n.d.). Its website notes that permaculture: 'helps us to design intelligent systems which meet human needs while enhancing biodiversity, reducing impact on the planet, and creating a fairer world for us all'. Several other websites tie the practice of permaculture at particular places to the neighbouring remains of Iron Age settlements (e.g. Cynefin Permaculture Farm n.d.). A book entitled *Building a Low Impact Roundhouse* is available through the Permaculture Market website (2023).

This ecological message has spread widely. The Chiltern Open Air Museum (Buckinghamshire, England) includes a range of reconstructed buildings from different historical periods, including one 'replica' Iron Age roundhouse, furnished for the period around 50 CE (Chiltern Open Air Museum 2021). The museum runs a series of school workshops about prehistory, including one on 'Iron Age Life' that takes place in the roundhouse. These workshops ask pupils to consider several issues such as: 'Discuss the sustainability of Iron Age lifestyle and compare this with our lifestyle in the 21st century' and 'Debate the ethics of food sourcing'.

These reconstructed Iron Age roundhouses may be at the forefront of a new building fashion. Several building companies offer to build roundhouses for clients. These initiatives appear less focused on building 'real' replica roundhouses than on constructing environmentally sensitive dwellings, out-houses and school rooms. Rotunda Roundhouse offers to build roundhouses for clients, advertising these as 'All round better buildings' (Rotunda 2022b). This website emphasises the environmental credentials of these constructions:

> We … believe that the *Roundhouse* is a building which *nurtures, heals, connects* and *inspires* us all. As an echo of an ancient world, far out of reach and with little in common to modern day humans. It acknowledges their existence, their close connection to the natural world and their ability to use only what they needed and not consume more.

The website reviews several of the round buildings constructed for clients by Rotunda, and includes a reference to an Iron Age site with roundhouses in Oxfordshire.

Research on the internet indicates that several other builders offer to construct round buildings for clients across the UK. The Roundhouse Company, based in Runcorn (Cheshire), is 'committed to inspiring and educating people from all walks of life in the art of natural building' (Roundhouse Company 2017). Their website states: 'We invite people to reconnect not only with nature but with themselves and empower them with skills to bring about positive change within their own lives and their communities.' They offer a basic roundhouse, around 6.5 metres in diameter and more substantial buildings. These are all built of timber and earth and can have various functions, such as outdoor classrooms and places of retreat. Planning permission for an 'eco-classroom inspired by an Iron Age roundhouse' was sought in 2021 by Wren School (Bath Road, Reading; Berkshire Live 2021). The intention is to provide a classroom for teaching pupils about sustainability.

These websites illustrate aspects of the different kinds of environmentalism in which ideas of the Iron Age have become enmeshed.[6] The 1970s ideas of self-sufficiency and back to nature that led to the actions of *Living in the Past* expressed disenchantment with modernity (see Garreau 2010). At this time, John Percival could conceive of settling a community that included children at an Iron Age 'village' for an entire year. The interests of this time do not exactly match the environmental concerns that worry many people today. People can now escape to the Iron Age for a few hours by visiting an open-air museum, or for a long weekend by renting a roundhouse in one of several attractive rural settings. Families with the money can fund the construction of a roundhouse to live in – and parents can help support their local school to fund the building of a round classroom to educate children to be environmentally sensitive.

Different Iron Age pasts have evolved at these roundhouse venues as a reflection of different presents. Glampers who seek 'escape' (if briefly) from modern, urban life may seek to escape digital modernity, precarious

working conditions and concerns about the future that give the Iron Age a particular attraction that is no doubt connected to earlier imaginations (a simple, spiritual life, 'back to nature', etc.). This is not animated by exactly the same set of concerns and pressures that motivated the early roundhouse reconstructors.[7]

Where do these concerns about the environment and inequality leave ideas of life in the Roman period?

Roman reconstructions: re-establishing order

Considering the higher profile of the Roman past in education and the media across England (Chapter 1), it might appear surprising that reconstructions of Roman buildings are far less common than Iron Age rebuildings. Roman-period reconstructions are limited to 15 places – and two of these Roman-period venues are (or, in one case, were) focused around roundhouse reconstructions (Castell Henllys and Brigantium). The other 13 Roman reconstruction sites include the ramparts and some of the associated buildings at seven Roman forts, a lavish villa (Villa Ventorum), a smaller villa (Butser), a townhouse (Wroxeter), the dining room of a villa (Avalon Archaeology Park) and a smithy workshop (Ancient Technology Centre).

One reason for the proliferation of roundhouses in contrast to Roman-period reconstructions is that these timber structures require far less substantial resources than constructing a Roman monumental building. Roundhouses require timber, daub and thatch, and these materials are available locally to many groups. Roman buildings often incorporate large quantities of faced stone and tile and require expert builders.

The townhouse at Wroxeter (Figure 3.7) was built in 2010 to give visitors an impression of how some urban dwellers lived in Roman towns (White 2016, 18–21). This project was filmed and broadcast as a TV series by Channel 4, as a group of builders with input from an archaeologist undertook the work. The builders were supposed to construct the house only using traditional techniques, and this operation took the seven builders six months and required 150 tons of sandstone bricks, 15 tons of lime mortar and 26 tons of plaster (Kennedy 2011).

A modest building, at least by the standards of the courtyard villas displayed across southern Britain, this townhouse was constructed using the information derived from an excavated building at Wroxeter. It has no mosaic floors and was built from timber with wattle and

Figure 3.7 The Roman townhouse at Wroxeter. Photographed by Richard Hingley, 2019. This site is in the guardianship of English Heritage.

daub with mud brick infilling, with a roof of wooden shingles and an attached fire-resistant bath suite. The guidebook to the site observes: 'The owners of the excavated townhouse [on which the reconstruction was based] seem to have accumulated their wealth gradually since they invested in making improvements to their house over an extended period' (White 2016, 20). Still, this reconstruction is more substantial than the timber strip buildings that predominate in Roman urban sites. The site guidebook continues: 'In the recreated house, income could have been generated by letting out the self-contained corner shop to a tenant, as was common. This tenant might have been a former slave of the household, who had purchased his freedom.' This emphasis on the idea of a freed slave living in such modest accommodation is a welcome aspect of this reconstruction, given the focus on the wealthy elite of Roman Britain at the substantial villas across southern Britain and at many of the museums (Chapter 2).

The Wroxeter project was unusual in that it attempted to use only traditional construction methods. However, even when modern building methods and technology are used, Roman buildings require a considerable outlay of labour and materials. A small colonnaded villa was constructed at the open-air museum at Butser in 2002–3, based on

the building excavated at nearby Sparsholt (Butser Ancient Farm n.d.; Johnston and Dicks 2014). When compared to the courtyard villas at Chedworth and Fishbourne, this is a modest building. Nevertheless, it required 350 tons of flint, 112 tons of mortar, 20 tons of plaster and 52 wattled and daub panels. The building was refurbished in 2017 with a mosaic pavement based on an example from Sparsholt.

The most remarkable recent reconstruction of a Roman-period building is the lavish Roman villa at The Newt (Castle Cary, Somerset). This building, which has been named Villa Ventorum (Villa of the Winds), is on the grounds of an exclusive hotel (Jarman 2023). Membership of The Newt, a high-end hotel, is required to visit the reconstruction and the neighbouring museum that features the surviving foundations of the Roman villa upon which the reconstruction was based (Newt n.d.). This venture opened so recently that we have not yet been able to visit. A recent review in the *British Archaeology* magazine emphasises that: 'what shines through is an overwhelming desire to create an immersive experience of life in Roman Britain' (Jarman 2023, 27). This approach at The Newt addresses the life of a wealthy Roman family.

Roman military reconstructions have a long history in Britain. The reconstruction project by Brian Hobley at the Lunt Roman Fort (Baginton, Coventry) followed on from the extensive excavations that uncovered the ramparts and the internal buildings of a Roman timber fort with several phases of construction (Hobley 1983). Additional buildings constructed during the 1980s included a circular enclosure (the 'gyrus') and a granary. The reconstructed sections of Hadrian's Wall at Vindolanda were built during the 1970s (Chapter 2) and the fort gateway at Arbeia (South Shields, Tyne and Wear) in 1988 (Bidwell, Miket and Ford 1988). At Richborough (Kent), English Heritage has recently reconstructed a length of the timber rampart of the Claudian fort and a gateway to provide a new experience for visitors (English Heritage n.d.e).

Park in the Past (Flintshire, Wales), close to Chester, is an ambitious venture to build a full-scale Roman fort on a landscaped ex-industrial site (Hirst 2024; Park in the Past 2023; Park in the Past n.d.). A crowdfunding campaign launched in 2018 raised the money used to build one of the gate towers of 'the first authentic Roman fort in almost 2,000 years' (Park in the Past n.d.). The idea came from Paul Harston, managing director of Roman Tours (Chester), an educational company that delivers Roman experiences for school children from its base in Chester (Hirst 2024, 35). Park in the Past's website (n.d.) notes that: 'Inspired by childhood conversations with his father, a local historian and volunteer archaeologist, Paul never lost sight of one day building a complete Roman fort.'

The aim is that:

> This Roman Realm will transport visitors back nearly 2,000 years to the time when the Roman Army marched into Wales to subdue and control the native Britons through strategically placed forts supported by signal stations and regular patrols into hostile territory in the 1st century around AD 70.

Work recommenced on the 'Britain's Big Fort Build' project in 2021. A promotional interactive design video shows what is intended, with a 'Roman style reception building', a standing stone avenue and an 'Earth House'. The building of the earthhouse, presumably inspired by one of reconstructions at the Ancient Technology Centre, is still to be started (Hirst 2024; Park in the Past 2023).

The earth and timber defences of the fort have been constructed by machine, along with the timber gateway incorporated into one of the entrances, four corner towers and at least one timber internal building. The emphasis placed on the uniqueness of this Roman fort reconstruction in the publicity online evidently links to the need to raise money for this initiative through crowdfunding and also reflects the relative scarcity of reconstructed Roman-period timber military fortifications. The Lunt is one of the few places at which to see a timber Roman military reconstruction.

Building on dualities

The Roman past has long been well known in Britain because of the focus of school education and the media on this period and also because of the predominance of ancient monuments of Roman date. The establishment of open-air museums, including those at Butser and Castell Henllys, aimed to provide venues where the public could experience the Iron Age, and these provided a counter to the inherited Romanocentrism of education and heritage provisions. The considerable increase in open-air venues has provided many sites where school groups and the public can experience Iron Age living. The fashion for constructing roundhouses since the early 1980s reflects a growing focus on sustainability and environmental concerns. Popular ideas of the Iron Age as a counterculture arose during the 1970s – these focused upon an egalitarian and sustainable farming past.

Local projects across much of Britain have built on this trend by finding the resources (sometimes from the NLHF) to construct their

roundhouse, usually as elements in educational initiatives (Chapter 5). In addition to the more 'official' venues that aim to attract informed visitors and school groups, several eco-centres and spiritual centres that draw loosely on the Iron Age have developed, particularly in Wales. ESCAPE in Norfolk proved short-lived, although others have proved popular, as in the case of Cae Mabon and Felin Uchaf. The use of 'Iron Age'/'Celtic' roundhouse architecture for building rentable holiday homes at five locations in western and northern Britain shows the attraction of Iron Age glamping. The increasing number of roundhouse reconstructions illustrate that the idea of Iron Age living is attractive to some holiday-makers, helping to counter the former dominance of the idea that the Iron Age past was an unruly and violently unsettled time. The hillforts of England, Wales and Scotland and the brochs of Scotland continue to present an image of a slightly less settled Iron Age, as do occasional discoveries of Iron Age weapons (Chapter 5).

Roman monuments remain popular for school groups and families to visit, although the Iron Age has more of a perceived connection with issues that seem particularly urgent in the modern world. Since interest in the Iron Age is driven, at least partly, by the growth of environmental consciousness, there may also be a sense, especially for schools, in which the Romans are beginning to appear problematic. During the mid-twentieth century, British society celebrated those who tamed nature through grand engineering initiatives that projected an idea of progress. Many people have become sceptical and ambivalent about such projects. The Romans may have become implicated in such concerns, reflecting their reputation for engineering work, town building, industry and mining. The focus on elite rural life at villas across the south may also concern those worried about increasing social inequality in Britain. Concerns about the elitism inherent in the concept of the classical country houses may also make ventures like Villa Ventorum seem problematic to some.

Although the reconstructed villa at Butser and the townhouse at Wroxeter are not as elaborate or substantial as the courtyard villas at Fishbourne, Chedworth and Bignor, or the reconstructed Villa Ventorum, these Roman venues serve to give a strong impression of progress from timber-built Iron Age roundhouses (at the open-air museums) to elite Roman stone buildings (at least across southern and central western Britain). The Iron Age can be seen as a spiritual, egalitarian and sustainable period of the past, where the concerns of modern life may be avoided for a school lesson, a weekend, or even for an entire lifetime. These Iron Age-inspired constructions aim to build a better tomorrow

from the residues of an ancient past. Roman venues also help people to engage with issues of pressing concern, including the mobilities of past populations and the unequal distribution of wealth in contemporary Britain.

The first two chapters of Part I have explored ancient monuments and reconstructions of ancient buildings across the UK. The next chapter addresses the re-enactment of the Iron Age and Roman past, addressing some of the ways that people have performed life in the ancient past.

Notes

1 http://doi.org/10.15128/r19c67wm84v.
2 This does not include some of the Iron Age-inspired round buildings constructed for clients by Rotunda Roundhouse and other modern building firms since these are only loosely based on Iron Age models.
3 Tom Yarrow, personal communication, September 2022.
4 By the 1990s, the team at Butser was staging an annual public festival at Beltain to welcome the Spring, which included burning a 'huge wicker man stuffed with straw' (Reynolds 1999, 134). Accompanied by an 'appropriate explanation', this was used 'to defuse any idea about neo-paganism or Druidic cults'. Festivals involving the burning of wicker men have since become popular ways of attracting visitors to Iron Age open-air museums (Sermon 2006).
5 Chris Caple, personal communication, May 2019.
6 Tom Yarrow, personal communication, June 2023.
7 Tom Yarrow, personal communication, June 2023.

4
Re-enacting Iron Age and Roman pasts

> Whether they are resisting the initial invasion, fighting a guerrilla war in Wales or fighting in open rebellion with Boudicca or Veneutius, then there is always a role for the belligerent native.
>
> (Vicus n.d.)

Introduction: re-enactment versus living history

This chapter addresses the practices of re-enacting the Iron Age and Roman pasts. Despite an increased focus on providing interpretation for visitors, archaeologists and historians rarely address re-enactment as an aspect of heritage (Hesse 2013, 183). Characterised by a general resistance to the idea that performing the past can have any archaeological value, the fact that re-enactors and living history performances attract the public to visit ancient monuments and open-air museums does not seem to be valued by the academic profession. Despite this, some historians, heritage researchers and archaeologists have started to address re-enactment and living history as an academic field of study (e.g. Gapps 2009; Hesse 2013; King 2011; Wallace 2007). Although published research on Iron Age and Roman re-enactment across Europe remains scarce, there has been a substantial increase in interest over the past decade (Appleby 2005; Birley and Griffiths 2022, 38–9; Bishop 2013; Bishop and Mills 2021; Bræder et al. 2017; Brown and Robson 2022; Burandt 2021; Dietler 2006, 241–4; González-Álvarez and Alonso González 2013; Griffiths 2021; Haines, Sumner and Naylor 2002; Rodríguez-Hernández and González-Álvarez 2020).

Re-enactment, which has been a popular activity in Britain since the 1980s, is used to portray all past periods (Corbishley 2011, 29–30). Performing the past is not, however, a united practice. Since the early days of re-enactment, a counter-tradition has developed, which is often titled 'living history'. Advocates of living history have sometimes been critical of the performances of re-enactors, arguing that they focus too much attention on costumes, battles and military manoeuvres, while living history performances tend to be characterised by the everyday and domestic activities of life in the past, such as agriculture, craft skills and cooking (Barrie and Dixon 2007, 38). Despite this, we will see that (like many of the other dualities addressed in this book) re-enactment and living history are not entirely distinct and contrasting concepts.

The website of the International Museum and Theatre Alliance (IMTAL), founded in 1990, describes its mission as 'to inspire and support the use of theatre and theatrical technique to cultivate emotional connections, provoke action and to add to the public value of museum experiences' (IMTAL 2024). IMTAL describes re-enactment as: 'A detailed recreation (often by a large number of people) of a single short-term historical event (such as a battle, designed to attract a large number of spectators), where action, costume and combat often take precedence over the spoken word.' Re-enactment in Britain has a long history that predates the modern conception of the meaning of living history. Groups of Roman re-enactors, for example, have extended their performances to address other aspects of military life, including manoeuvres, weapon displays and the domestic life of communities, including women and children.

IMTAL describes living history as the performance of 'historically authentic activities in an appropriate context, often the open-air museum'. This focus on the 'authentic' and the 'appropriate' reflects the emphasis within heritage studies on what has been defined as 'experiential authenticity' (Chapter 3) and on the use of archaeological 'evidence' and performance as a prime source of understanding the past (Birley and Griffiths 2022, 38; Holtorf 2014, 790; Penrose 2020, 1249). Living history as a means of performing the past has gained prominence over the past two decades, encompassing a range of experimental and story-telling approaches (Kidd 2011; West and Bowman 2010).

There is a substantial overlap between living history and re-enactment in the UK today since many groups that title themselves 're-enactors' also perform experimental and story-telling approaches. Perhaps this reflects a growing desire over the past 20 years to pacify

the past by focusing on positive messages (as the world has become more chaotic). In the company of all the dualities explored in this book, the division between re-enactment and living history is an abstraction. Many of the groups considered in this chapter overlap between the definitions given above for these two types of performing. An online list of groups across the UK provided by an organisation called Historic UK provides an illustration. The terminological confusion between the definitions of re-enactment and living history is emphasised by this organisation's aim to provide a 'Reenactment directory', described as a 'directory of UK-based living history societies and associations' (Historic UK n.d.). This list is kept up to date and is a helpful resource. Some of the groups listed by Historic UK, however, provide services that fit with IMTAL's definition of living history rather re-enactment.

This chapter identifies and discusses Iron Age- and Roman-themed groups that identify themselves – or are identified by others – on the internet as re-enactors. Some of these are living history groups rather than re-enactors in the literal sense, for example, the Rhynie Wifies (below). Creating lists of individuals and small groups that fall more strictly within the definition of living history would be a more challenging activity that would result in a far longer list. Research undertaken for the *Ancient Identities* project has indicated the scale of living history focused on several Iron Age open-air museums (Part II). Nevertheless, the information discussed in this chapter allows a discussion of the history of the re-enactment movement and some of the developments in how these groups have performed ancient pasts.

Iron Age and Roman re-enactment

Arising from pageants of past ages, held in cities across Britain during the early twentieth century, re-enactment began to be taken more seriously during the 1960s in America when Civil War re-enactments became popular (Bishop 2013, 25; Hesse 2013, 172). In 1968, the English Civil War re-enactment group, The Sealed Knot, was founded. The first Roman group, the Ermine Street Guard, was created in 1972 (Bishop 2013, 25; Haines, Sumner and Naylor 2002, 119). The rector of the parish of Whitcombe and Bentham (Gloucestershire) decided in 1971 to hold a historic pageant featuring periods from the past to raise money. One of the periods featured was the Roman past (Ermine Street Guard 2024). Eight Roman re-enactors were equipped with reconstructed Roman legionary kit and after this single event they decided to continue their activities under the name the Ermine Street Guard. This group is still

going strong today and performed, for instance, at the opening of the Legion Exhibition at the British Museum in January 2024.

Roman re-enactment remained mainly a British phenomenon until the 1980s, although the fashion spread and there are now many such groups across Europe, the USA and the world (Bishop 2013, 25; Burandt 2021, 136). Roman re-enactors and archaeologists co-operated across Europe during the 1980s, establishing international standards for the way that legionary soldiers should dress, the weapons they should carry and the military tactics to adopt (Appleby 2005; Bishop 2013; Haines, Sumner and Naylor 2002). Most Roman re-enactors have, since the 1970s, dressed up to perform the role of legionary soldiers, the elite citizen soldiers of the Roman empire (Appleby 2005). Re-enactment as a field of performance has diversified since the 1980s from an early focus on stock figures from history as communicated in school – such as Roman legionaries, medieval knights, Vikings, pirates and the Wild West – to focus on many different historical contexts and peoples (Hesse 2013, 174). In the context of Roman re-enactment, this diversification of performers includes those who take on the roles of auxiliary soldiers, women and children.

Several Iron Age groups were established during the late twentieth century to provide 'enemies' for legionaries to fight. These groups became more prominent in the minds of the public because of the scenes of fighting between Romans and 'barbarians' in the successful films *Gladiator* (2000), *Centurion* (2010) and *The Eagle* (2011). These films employed Iron Age re-enactors alongside their Roman foes to stage the battle scenes. Iron Age re-enactors are also used to interpret and draw the public to open-air museums. We shall see, however, that most of these groups have disbanded over the past decades.

Figure 4.1 plots the groups for which a period is specified on the Historic UK's Reenactment Directory website (Historic UK n.d.). Prehistoric groups are extremely scarce since only one is listed. Even the Roman groups are limited in number compared to those that address early medieval and medieval pasts – especially compared to groups that address Georgian and recent military history. This appears to indicate a decline in the popularity of Roman re-enacting, which seems surprising since Roman groups were some of the first established in the UK. This website does not, however, provide an entirely accurate record of the number of Roman groups.

To explore this further, we have compiled lists of re-enactment groups in England, Wales and Scotland that specialise (or used to specialise) in re-enacting the Iron Age and Roman periods. The data

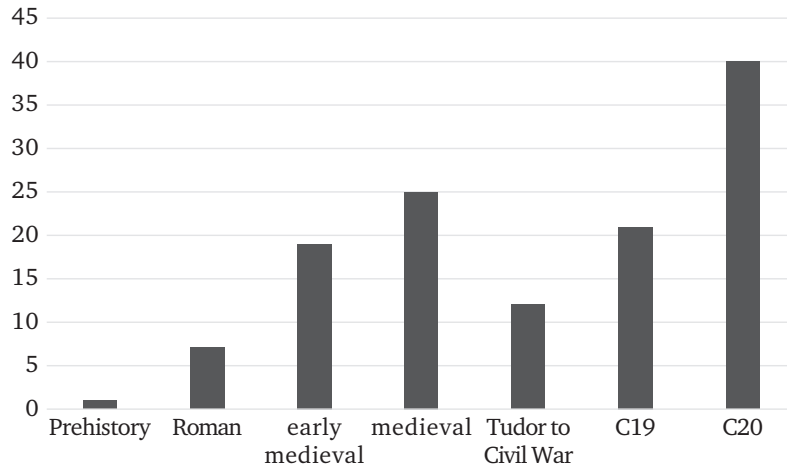

Figure 4.1 Chart showing re-enactment groups included in the list provided by Historic UK (n.d.), showing the number of groups that perform particular periods (showing number of sites on the y axis). © Richard Hingley.

included in two lists has been collected from the internet on four occasions (between May 2015 and autumn/winter 2023), by searching for groups in the UK using the terms: (1) 'Iron Age' and 're-enactment' and 'Celtic' and 're-enactment' and (2) 'Roman' and 're-enactment' (Tables 4.1 and 4.2; Online Data Tables 6 and 7[1]). This information, assessed below, shows the limitations of the Historic UK website, since we have located 14 (rather than seven) Roman re-enactment groups that remain active. As stated, some of the groups identified by this method are living history performers if the strict terminology (above) is applied. Using the internet to identify such groups may provide a rather coarse methodology. The websites maintained by such groups are likely, however, to have been regularly updated since most groups offer their services to clients such as heritage agencies, schools and film producers. Iron Age and Roman re-enactors have often been employed to appear in films such as *Gladiator* and *The Eagle* and are regularly used to draw the public to monuments and events.

Collecting this information on four occasions (between 2015 and 2023) enables an assessment of how Iron Age and Roman re-enactment has been faring. For example, most of the Iron Age groups ceased to operate during this time.

Table 4.1 Iron Age/Celtic re-enactment groups

This information is derived from a search on the internet using Google undertaken in May 2015, July 2017, July 2021 and September 2023. The groups in italics no longer appear to be active.

Name	Region (if any)	Notes
Brigantia Iron Age Celtic re-enactment	Portsmouth, Hampshire	Founded 1990, not a big group but has done shows with 40 fighters.
Cantiaci Iron Age Living History Group	Gillingham, Kent	Active in the late 1990s and early 2000s.
Damnonii 1st century Celtic Re-enactment Society	Erskine, Renfrewshire	Founded 1996; sister group to VIII Augusta.
Dumnonika Iron Age British (Celtic) Re-enactment Group	Based in the south-west	Founded in 2011 and based in the south-west of Britain.
Prytani	Based in north Wales	Performed a ceremony at St Fagans open-air museum in 1991 to bless the 'Celtic Village'.
The Rhynie Wifies	Based in Aberdeenshire, Scotland	A group that performs Iron Age living history.
The Silures	Based in Wales	A re-enactment group that was active during the 1990s.
Swords of Dalriada, Scottish Historical Re-enactment group	Based in Ayrshire	Focuses on the Scottish wars of independence, the Viking invasions, Iron Age Caledonia and the Jacobite rebellion.
The Vicus, Romans and Britons		A group that portrays the Roman invasion of Britain, from 43 to 84 CE.
Yr Hyddgen, Torfaen Community Theatre Group	Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Wales	A living history group that promotes Welsh culture, culture and living history.

Table 4.2 Roman re-enactment groups

This information is derived from a search on the internet using Google undertaken in May 2015, July 2017, July 2021 and September 2023. The groups in italics no longer appear to be active.

Name	Region	Notes
Ancient Britain	Hadrian's Wall/ Carlisle	A group that organises tours along the wall and provides information on the prehistoric and Roman past.
The Antonine Guard, Legio VI Victrix	Scotland	Founded in 1996 to promote awareness of Scotland's Roman heritage, recent events are in Scotland.

Table 4.2 (continued)

Name	Region	Notes
The Batavi	English Midlands and south of the UK	A small group that re-enacts military and civil life in the fourth to sixth centuries CE.
Britannia	Essex	Portrays life and combat in Britain during the conquest and the Late Roman period, including provincial gladiators.
The Butser IX Legion	Hampshire	A Roman re-enactment group with a mission to engage and inform the public about the Roman world.
Cohors I Fida Vardullorum	Colchester, Essex	Originally a legionary group but later specialised in re-enacting an auxiliary unit of Vardulli from Spain.
Cohors Quinta Gallorum	South Shields, Tyne & Wear	Aims to reconstruct and display to the public all aspects of military and civil life in early third-century Britain.
Comitatus	Midlands and north England	Late Roman re-enactment group, also portrays early Romans, Greeks and (apparently) Celtic Britain.
Deva Victrix Leg XX v.v	Chester	Specialist providers of Roman history to schools and museums across the UK, including portraying the life of a Roman soldier.
Ermine Street Guard, Legio XX Valeria Victrix	Originally in Gloucestershire	Roman re-enactment society dedicated to 'research into the Roman Army and the reconstruction of Roman armour and equipment'.
Legio Secvnda Avgvsta		Founded over 20 years ago, this group has a military and a civilian section.
Legio VIII Augusta	North Wales	Formed around 1995 aiming to recreate and present the costumes and everyday activities of the people living in Roman Britain around 100 CE.
The Longthorpe Legion	Cambridgeshire	A living history group based in Cambridgeshire.
The Roman Military Research Society		A UK-based group that research and perform practical experiments to recreate and perform Roman military and civil life.
The Vicus, Roman and Britons		A group that portrays the Roman invasion of Britain, from 43–84 CE.

Re-enacting the Iron Age

Iron Age re-enactment groups have always been less common than their Roman rivals and few Iron Age groups still exist (Table 4.1). Information on the internet during the middle of the last decade – when we undertook the first search – indicated the existence of eight groups that offered Iron Age re-enactment. Only two of these appear to remain active – and there are two new groups. There used to be a website called 'Kelticos' that provided an international point of contact for those involved in Iron Age living history (Kelticos 2017). Like several websites referenced in this chapter, this resource is no longer available. A request for information on this website (in 2015) asked for the names of any active Iron Age re-enactment groups in Britain. A reply mentioned that Iron Age re-enactment groups were 'groups of friends who eventually fell out with each other' and that few remained active. Two groups that remained active on the internet enact multiple periods of the past, rather than focusing specifically on the Iron Age (Swords of Dalriada and the Vicus). The two other Iron Age groups operating today – the Rhynie Wifies and Yr Hyddgen – perform living history rather than re-enacting (using the definitions given by IMTAL).

Iron Age living history has developed a much wider following during the past 15 years, reflecting the strong tradition in archaeology and at open-air museums of viewing the Iron Age as a period of egalitarian and sustainable living in which people had a close connection with the resources of their local region. There have been occasional exceptions to the decline in staged armed conflict in which Iron Age warriors have fought with Roman legionaries. For example, English Heritage organised an event at Birdoswald Roman fort in September 2015 when 80 Roman legionary soldiers from the Italian re-enactment group Legio I Italica fought with 50 'Caledonian barbarians', also played by Italians (Scarff 2015). The local paper *Living North* reported that Hadrian's Wall 'will once more be occupied by Italian legionaries. But don't panic, there hasn't been an invasion' (Living North 2015). In addition to the staged battle with the Caledonians, Legio I Italica performed weapon displays and military manoeuvres.

An Iron Age living history group on Facebook connects 'Iron Age re-enacting / living history anywhere in the world' and had over 2,400 members in August 2022 (Iron Age Living History n.d.). The website, which now is only open to registered members, includes discussions of the most appropriate clothes and weapons and details of living history performances and events. While Iron Age living history has been popular

at open-air museums and as a theme for National Lottery Heritage Funded (NLHF) community projects (Chapter 5), staged conflicts that include Iron Age warriors have become uncommon.

At least five of the eight groups that formerly provided Iron Age re-enactment were initially founded during the 1990s when several Roman groups were already active. Some of these groups have helped draw attention to open-air museums. For example, the Welsh group the Prytani held a ceremony at the opening of the St Fagans Celtic village (Cardiff, Wales) in 1991 to offer a blessing, while the Vicus assisted with the reconstruction of a palisade at St Fagans when the open-air museum was restored in 2004, helping to bring the site to life (Rhys 2008, 241, 246). The websites available in 2015 and 2017, many of which no longer exist, indicated that the Iron Age groups emphasised weaponry and fighting, although all these groups also presented aspects of everyday life. Many groups drew upon the names of the Iron Age peoples (or tribes) of Britain. The writings of classical authors and inscribed Iron Age coins enable the establishment of the approximate locations of these Iron Age peoples (see Moore 2011). The sense of regional identity that these 'tribes' provided appealed to the members of Iron Age re-enactment groups.

The Damnonii 1st century Celtic Re-enactment Society was founded in 1996 to specialise in the 'Celtic lifestyle and battle re-enactments'; it no longer exists. It worked with its 'sister society', the Roman group VIII Augusta (Damnonii 2017). The name Damnonii was taken from a people of southern Scotland, not to be confused with a people of the same name in south-western England (Rivet and Smith 1979, 342–4). The members that formed this group were recruited from around Erskine (close to Glasgow). They performed, for example, at Chester Roman fortress (Cheshire) and on Hadrian's Wall. Another group that has disbanded is the Brigantia Iron Age Celtic re-enactment group, formerly based in Portsmouth (Hampshire, England). Brigantia was established in 1990 to undertake public displays of 'combat and living history' in Britain and overseas (Brigantia 2017). They emphasised their educational work for schools and the 'combat and domestic displays' undertaken for English Heritage. Their website explained that the 'iron age Celts' enjoyed combat and that the group used metal weapons and 'authentic wooden shields'. The Iron Age people called the Brigantes, as the website noted, referred to a substantial 'tribe' that occupied what is now northern England and southern Scotland, many hundreds of miles to the north of Portsmouth.

The Cantiaci Iron Age Living History Group had a different agenda that, as their name implied, fitted better with the category of living

history than re-enactment. The name 'Cantiaci' referred to the Iron Age people that formerly occupied Kent (Cantiaci 2002). Formed from a small group of volunteers, the Cantiaci aimed to show 'life as it may have been' from around 800 BCE to 43 CE. Their base was at the 'Iron Age village' at Riverside Country Park (Gillingham, Kent), where a 'typical Iron Age farmstead' had been reconstructed with a single roundhouse by members with the full support of the park managers. This roundhouse burned down in the early 2000s and there is no evidence to indicate that the Cantiaci group still exists, although their website was still available in September 2023. They aimed to bring Iron Age society to life for visiting school groups through narrated visits to the roundhouse led by re-enactors and educational rangers.

The Cantiaci's website notes that: 'children are encouraged to experience the sights, sounds and smells of the Iron Age. Each child has the opportunity to make some pottery to take away with them'. Members of this group practised a range of skills, including building techniques, metalworking, spinning, natural dyeing, weaving, pottery, woodworking, prehistoric cookery, net making, thatching and the growing of 'indigenous plants of the period'. All members wore 'fully researched clothing and equipment' during these living history performances. The Cantiaci hosted a Beltane festival each year, 'displaying Iron Age spring customs in the company of other historical groups and "traditional entertainers"'. This group appears to have drawn upon the agenda developed at the Iron Age open-air museum at Butser Ancient Farm by focusing activities primarily on agriculture, everyday life and industry. The Cantiaci visited Castell Henllys for a weekend of feasting in 2000 during the filming of the BBC TV series *Surviving the Iron Age* (Firstbrook 2001, 107).

Another group, Dumnonika, was founded in 2011 and used to perform life in the British Iron Age (Dumnonika 2014). Based in south-western England, the name was derived from the Dumnonii, a people who lived in the modern counties of Devon, Cornwall and parts of Somerset. Their website, no longer available, emphasised living history performances:

> As a group we present a snapshot of elements of Iron Age life, from cooking using authentic ingredients and cooking utensils to a demonstration of the colours available through dyes of the period, as well as a selection of examples of goods the region is known to have traded in. We also have an Iron Age blacksmith available, and while they're not entertaining you in the display area our battle weary warriors sit around passing the time with games.

Weapons and combat formed part of Dumnonika's performances, but this group aimed to show that the Iron Age was about much more than fighting with reproductions of Iron Age weapons.

Of the groups that still appear to remain active, the Vicus Re-enactment Society describes itself as an 'Iron Age and Roman re-enactment society'. Their title derives from the Latin term for the 'small towns' that grew up around Roman forts, 'places where the "native population" would routinely interact with Roman forces' (Vicus 2004).[2] Their period of interest is primarily the first two generations after the Roman invasion of Britain. The old website in 2017 advertised for: 'recruits to join either our Roman units, British warriors or to live and work within the Vicus itself' (Vicus 2004). Unlike many other Iron Age groups, the Vicus does not represent any particular tribe since they perform across southern England and the West Midlands. This group aims to interpret the past through experimental archaeology, reconstruction and living history. They hold events at places that are felt to be 'historically right or themed for our period'. The Vicus is unusual among re-enactment groups in being able to supply soldiers to fight on both sides in simulated conflicts between Britons and Romans. They also place some emphasis on living history events, including scenes of Iron Age and early Roman domestic life.

The Vicus has held living history displays at Butser Ancient Farm, the Chiltern Open Air Museum, Flag Fen, St Fagans and the Ancient Technology Centre. Much of their work focuses on the display of Roman and Iron Age domestic life. The website observes: 'Whether they are resisting the initial invasion, fighting a guerrilla war in Wales or fighting in open rebellion with Boudicca or Veneutius, then there is always a role for the belligerent native.' In June 2021, the Vicus held a weekend training day at the Lunt Roman Fort – the first since lockdown – and they have held regular events since (Vicus n.d.).

The Yr Hyddgen group follows a different direction that draws more fully upon the living history approach, aiming to promote Welsh culture, culture and living history (Yr Hyddgen 2021; Yr Hyddgen n.d.). Their old website had an introduction by Ānerin, a Derwydd, or druid. It introduced creative stories about the ancient past. The performances of this group seem unusual since they focus on the spiritual aura of the pre-Roman past. This is the only Iron Age group that we have found that claims a direct kinship with Iron Age ancestors. Yr Hyddgen has received a grant from the NLHF for a project on 'The Heroic Peoples of the Silures (Y Siulures)', which included a 'boot camp' at which young people could prepare to fight against the Roman invaders (Yr Hyddgen 2021).

The conflicts with invading Romans appear to have formed a minor element that Yr Hyddgen addressed lightly.

Another group still active in the UK is Swords of Dalriada, based in Ayrshire (Scotland; Swords of Dalriada 2021). This multiperiod re-enactment group focuses on 'Scottish wars of independence'. Several other groups across the Channel re-enact the Scottish Wars of Independence, although battles between Romans and Iron Age peoples form only a minor element in their repertoires (Hesse 2013). The medieval wars with southern English invaders hold far more popular interest.

Little research has been undertaken on the ideas of the Iron Age that re-enactment and living history portray. Sue Ballard (2007, 173) observed almost two decades ago that the portrayals of Iron Age male warriors common in British museums exhibit the 'limits of the range of identities constructed' and marginalise the roles of others, including women, children, the elderly and labourers. Gender divisions in the presentation of the Iron Age persist in some media. A search on Google Images using the term 'Iron Age warrior' in June 2023 produced almost entirely images of men (including photographs and illustrations), with a sparse scattering of women. Images derived from a Google search on 'Iron Age' and 'weaving' resulted in images entirely of women. Attempts have been made in museums and publications to portray ideas of Iron Age gender in less conventional terms (Giles 2016, 413, 423–4).

The British Iron Age clearly has a direct potential to challenge the traditional idea of the male Celtic warrior and female housewife, since the classical texts of Tacitus and Dio describe the actions of the ancient resistance leader Boudica, who led her forces in an uprising against the Romans in 60 CE (Beard and Henderson 1999). Several female re-enactors have portrayed Boudica at events across Britain over the past decade. For example, the Ermine Street Guard carried out military manoeuvres outside Colchester (Essex) on 10 June 2017 and 'Boudica, queen of the Iceni, made an appearance with her chariot' (Colchester Archaeologist 2017). The website that reported this event noted the irony of this family-friendly Boudica, since this ancient warrior was responsible for sacking and burning the Roman colony of Camulodunum (Colchester).

A search for images of Boudica and re-enactment on Google Images produces scores of sites, including photographs of re-enactors portraying Boudica in her chariot and ancient Britons and of Romans facing up to battle. It is still possible to find Iron Age warriors to perform at public events even though many Iron Age re-enactment groups have ceased to remain active. The most graphic images of Boudica derive

from a substantial re-enactment event close to Moscow (Russia) on 6 June 2015 that featured an 'Army of Celts' performing Boudica's rebellion (Dreamstime n.d.). Some of the Iron Age re-enactment groups in Britain also evidently included female warriors in their performances, although male Iron Age warriors were always far more common (Hesse 2013, 180–2).

The website of the Rhynie Wifies suggests that the performances of this group also critique traditional gender divisions. This group notes that they have many decades of experience in Iron Age living history, including ancient crafts, cooking food, archery and a warrior school (Reenactment Scotland n.d.). A photograph shows five women in long cloaks standing with four Roman legionary re-enactors behind them. Two of the female re-enactors, however, are armed with weapons, reflecting the common idea that Iron Age women fought as warriors. Rhynie is a village in Aberdeenshire, not too far from the most favoured location of the battle of Mons Graupius, in which the Roman general Agricola defeated the assembled forces of the Caledonians in 84 CE. It is also the site of major recent archaeological work that has uncovered substantial and important evidence for Pictish occupation. The photos on their website indicate that the Rhynie Wifies also draw directly upon Pictish imagery, a reminder that the period that archaeologists title the Iron Age continues well into the first millennium CE in Scotland.

Roman re-enactments

Table 4.2 lists the Roman re-enactment groups; 15 of these groups remain active (see also Online Data Table 7). Some overseas groups also occasionally visit sites in Britain to perform, including Legio I Italica. The information recorded in Table 4.2 will not be complete since there are hints on the internet of other local groups connected with particular ancient monuments. For example, the Raven-Tor multi-period living history group focus their performances mainly on medieval living history, although they also undertake Roman re-enactment, including performances at Bignor Roman Villa in 2024 (West Sussex; Raven-Tor 2024). Table 4.2 includes some of the most prominent Roman re-enactment groups in Britain and several smaller groups that appear to have performed on several occasions.

This information helps to place some of the earlier published research on Roman re-enactment in context. The most substantial contribution to discussions of Roman re-enactment in Britain is by

Graham Appleby, who was a re-enactor for 15 years and undertook an archaeology degree before publishing his study. Appleby (2005, 258) argued that re-enactors are an excluded group that many archaeologists treat cautiously. A few archaeologists, including Mike Bishop and Simon James, have worked with Roman re-enactors, usually helping to advise on the appearance of Roman weapons and armour (Bishop 2013). The archaeological team at Vindolanda have also had a sustained engagement with Roman re-enactors. Two performers connected to Vindolanda have produced an insightful article that addresses performances along Hadrian's Wall, clearly showing that traditional approaches to Roman re-enactment have been transforming (Brown and Robson 2022).

Since the 1990s, archaeologists have reacted against traditional interpretations of Roman Britain by addressing the complexity of the multiple identities of people living within the province (Hingley 2021a; Mattingly 2006). Roman re-enactment has reacted to changes in academic focus by addressing the auxiliary soldiers who served alongside the (more visible) legionary soldiers and by performing the roles of the camp followers (the women and children who accompanied the troops). This idea of the military community builds on the information from excavation, particularly the work at Vindolanda. The civil occupants of the Roman province – the villa owners and agricultural peasants and slaves – are not represented by the re-enactors and living history performers.

Professional and semi-professional

Appleby (2005, 258) observed that heated disputes raged in the Roman re-enactment community about how to portray historical details, how to dress, and over their equipment and military tactics. Re-enactors draw upon finds of Roman military equipment and images of soldiers on Roman tombstones to replicate authentic weapons and armour for their performances (Bishop 2013, 25; Burandt 2021). A company called Armamentaria Limited used to specialise in the supply of 'replica Roman artefacts to the re-enactment community, museums and collectors'. Armamentaria's website emphasised the 'authenticity' and 'accuracy' of the recreated artefacts that were supplied to re-enactors, including armour and equipment, broches, tools, *terra sigillata* (samian pottery) and 'Celtic Helmets' (Armamentaria 2017). The Armamentaria website is no longer available, although other companies continue to supply reproduction Roman military accoutrements online. This professionalisation of arms supply exemplifies a dominant conception of material

authenticity among some re-enactors (see Chapter 3). Despite this, the 'quality and accuracy' of historical performances today is unregulated, which has led to disputes among Roman re-enactors (Brown and Robson 2022, 122).

There is a lack of information about the inspirations and backgrounds of those who perform Roman re-enactment. Robin Brown has noted that almost all performers are volunteers, and few professional re-enactors earn a living from their performances (Brown and Robson 2022, 122). The dependence on non-professionals means that many groups can only perform for the public at weekends. Re-enactors today tend to operate individually or in small groups to cater for school visits, perform at heritage venues or act as guides. Nevertheless, major Roman monuments such as Hadrian's Wall and the legionary fortress at Chester provide opportunities for re-enactors and living history practitioners to run businesses. Deva Victrix is a semi-professional re-enactment group traditionally based at the site of the Roman legionary fortress at Chester and now also at the open-air museum at Park in the Past. Brown is a volunteer re-enactor and Events Coordinator for the Legio VIII Augusta. He reflects in his account on an ongoing recruitment crisis in Roman re-enactment as many of the first generation of performers are getting old (Brown and Robson 2022, 126).

Legionaries, auxiliaries and their families

Most Roman groups in Britain, in the company of those of Europe and the USA, perform the role of legionary soldiers, drawing upon a long history of performance dating back to the creation of the Ermine Street Guard (Appleby 2005; Bishop 2013). These relatively high-ranking citizen troops have developed a high international visibility among the public. Of the 15 groups listed in Table 4.2, six, including some of the most well-known, are named after legions that were present in Britain. The Longthorpe group derives its name from a legionary fortress for which the identity of the resident garrison is not clear (Longthorpe Legion n.d.).

Acts of combat in Roman military re-enactment were more common in the 1970s and have become increasingly rare as they are difficult to organise and seldom look anything but staged (Bishop 2013, 25). Armed conflicts are still arranged on occasions, as with the staged battle between Roman legionaries and Caledonians fought at Birdoswald fort in September 2015. One factor that has perpetuated the popularity of the Roman legionary re-enactment groups is their use by heritage agencies to attract the public to visit the prominent Roman ancient monuments

of central and southern Britain during the summer months (Brown and Robson 2022, 133).

Appleby (2005, 257) argued two decades ago that Roman re-enactment tends to: 'pander to popularised notions of Roman culture, replete with red tunics, togas, shiny helmets and armour' focusing on military and elite aspects, with less emphasis on the more mundane aspects of life. It has been calculated from surviving documentation from the classical past that the largest legionary population of Britain at any one time (under Hadrian) was probably not more than around 25,000 soldiers, while there may well have been at least twice the number of auxiliary soldiers (Hingley 2022, 209–10). Legionaries probably represented around 1.5 per cent of the population of around 1,600,000 people in Britain. Legionary soldiers would, however, have had a prominent role in some parts of the province. This focus on the legionary soldier in re-enactment reflects a long academic tradition of emphasising these elite soldiers in a manner that sidelines the non-citizen auxiliary units (Haynes 2013, 5). The image of the legionary soldier has a remarkable degree of international currency, explaining why re-enactors often seek to portray them. Roman re-enactors have, however, responded positively to the idea that the auxiliary soldiers deserve greater prominence, and at least seven of the groups in our list also have re-enactors who perform the role of auxiliary soldiers. The auxiliary units of the Roman military included the more lightly armed infantry soldiers and mounted cavalry soldiers.

Re-enactors have also started, since the late 1990s, to focus on portraying everyday life and crafts, although demonstration of drills and tactical formations remain popular at all their events. In keeping with a long tradition with roots in the ancient past, Roman re-enactors tend to perform within rigid gender roles (see González-Álavarez and Alonso González 2013). It is not usually possible for women to serve as legionary or auxiliary soldiers. The women and children accompanying male legionary re-enactors usually perform Roman-style cooking and spinning (as with the Rhynie Wifies). Another activity is for women to display elegant Roman-style clothing and jewellery.

This portrayal of gender division is realistic since women and children could not join the Roman army. Many forts and fortresses had external civil settlements (often called *vici*) where the unofficial families of soldiers and traders lived. The growing focus on family life and domestic activity in Roman re-enactment finds reflection in the changing emphasis of academic research that has transformed from a focus on the careers and lives of soldiers to the exploration of the military

communities of which the soldiers formed part (see Haynes 2013; James 2001). Despite this, in Roman re-enactment, the legionary soldiers remain the most recognisable figures for the public.

Sense of place

Roman re-enactment groups often call upon a particular sense of place, tying themselves to Roman fortresses, forts and frontier systems. The Deva Victrix group was established in 1997 to 'illuminate the life of a Roman soldier and life in Roman Britain' (Roman Tours 2018). The group was created to provide interpretations of Roman life in Chester, the site of the Roman fortress of Deva, for schools and visitors. Initially, Deva Victrix had the 'primary function' of parading through Chester during the summer to attract tourists. Their performances aim to bring the remains of the Roman fortress – including the walls, the physical remains of several buildings and the artefacts in the local museum – to life for visitors and school groups. Deva Victrix is now the 'resident re-enactment group' at the open-air museum at Park in the Past, where a full-scale Roman auxiliary fort is under construction (Chapter 3). This group perform military and Sarmatian cavalry events throughout the year and is often available to explain military life and to share discoveries. These activities can be offered during the week, enabling the re-enactors to work with school groups.

Deva Victrix illustrates many of the traditional characteristics of a Roman re-enactment group and emphasises their dedication to 'pushing the boundaries of our knowledge of the Roman period', including weekend camps, full combat drill, route marches carrying full equipment and drinking and gambling at the campfire (Roman Tours 2018). This group has a strong interest in military equipment and emphasises experimental methodologies and the new information arising from archaeological research. Roman military religion also features in their performances and Deva Victrix has access to the archaeological remains of the shrine of Minerva just outside the walls of Chester, at which they have performed rituals (Figure 4.2). The photographs on their website emphasise the life of the legionary soldiers, although they also feature girls and boys trying on legionary equipment.

The Legio II Augusta derives its name from the Roman legion based for a lengthy period at the legionary fortress of Caerleon (Isca; Newport) (Legio Secunda Augusta n.d.). This group was founded over 25 years ago and aims to re-enact the period from 43 CE to the end of the second century. Legio II originated in north Wales but, like several

Figure 4.2 A photograph of the shrine of Minerva at Chester. Photographed by Richard Hingley, 2019.

other Roman re-enactment groups, membership has spread. They now have members in south Wales, northern England and Scotland. Their displays range from: 'battle drill and formation training in the field, to a soldier's life in the camp carrying out duties, chores and past times', as well as interacting with civilians and merchants. Legio II has performed at Caerleon (Newport), where there are substantial remains of the fortress and amphitheatre, and also at the Museum of London, Chedworth Roman Villa and overseas in the Netherlands. The group has worked for Sky TV, the BBC, the Discovery Channel and Channel 4. They offer the opportunity to learn the ways of a Roman soldier and hold 'Living History Encampments' that include writing, industry, cooking and fashion. Their displays primarily focus, however, on the Roman military and aspects of life connected with the military. Legio II states that the group is currently establishing a 'Celtic section'. This would make it possible to display how Iron Age peoples interacted with Romans in the civil and military spheres.

The Roman legionary fortress at York (Eboracum) does not have its own dedicated legionary re-enactment unit. York is better known for

its Viking heritage than its significant role in Roman times. In June 2016, the first Eboracum Roman Festival drew an audience of more than 28,000 people. Promoted by the York Museum Trust, the festival aimed to highlight the Roman collections in the Museum. The event was held for a second time from 1 to 4 June 2017 in the Yorkshire Museum Gardens, including: 'an even bigger and better programme of family-friendly displays, exhibits, events and activities, including military parades, siege weapon demonstrations, a camp showing what domestic life was like during the period and stalls selling themed goods' (York Museum Trust 2017a). Roman parades over the weekend included 'six Roman Legions and Roman civilians' who marched through the streets of York (York Museum Trust 2017b). A 'living history camp' was designed to showcase domestic life, addressing 'the life, culture and trades of the legions'.

The photographs on the festival website focus on the Roman legionary displays, although the events also featured additional aspects of domestic life. One of the activities was 'Fashion of the Roman Lady', exhibiting the elite focus of much Roman re-enactment. The display of high-class Roman fashions is appropriate at York, which, in Roman times, was a colony and fortress and formed the campaigning base for two visiting Roman emperors, Septimius Severus and Constantius I (Ottaway 2004, 79–81, 133). An 'Archaeology Tent' enabled members of the public to meet professional archaeologists to discuss the ways that they record and interpret sites and artefacts. The Eboracum Festival became even more elaborate in 2018 and 2019. Cancelled in 2020–2 because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the event was revived in 2023.

The emphasis on Roman legionary life at these three fortresses is entirely understandable, although legionary soldiers have been prominent in re-enactment events at other heritage venues across Britain. Most events at Roman attractions use legionaries to draw the public by bringing the monuments to life. Legionaries manned the fortresses and probably undertook much construction work on Roman fortifications during the first century of Roman rule. There were, however, around twice as many auxiliaries as legionaries in Britain. These auxiliary soldiers often fought in the front line and garrisoned the Roman forts and the two frontier works (Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall).

Hadrian's Wall is the highest-profile Roman monument and, since 1987, a World Heritage Site. The wall is a significant focus for tourism (Hingley 2012, 301–25). A search on Google Images using the terms 'Hadrian's Wall' and 're-enactment' (in March 2024) resulted in numerous images of Roman legionary re-enactors and very few of auxiliaries. English Heritage's current website (March 2024) advertises

three themes on its initial page – Stonehenge, London's Blue Plaques and Hadrian's Wall (English Heritage n.d.a). Clicking on the wall takes the visitor to another page with photographs of four jovial legionaries. The garrisons along the wall were auxiliaries, not legionaries. The Vindolanda Charitable Trust has also commonly used legionary re-enactors to draw the public to its events at this hinterland fort of the wall.

Scotland's highest-profile Roman monument is the Antonine Wall, now a World Heritage Site. The news and events section of the World Heritage website for this monument shows children wearing plastic versions of legionary helmets (Antonine Wall n.d.). One of the legionary re-enactment groups, the Antonine Guard, which regularly contributes to events along the wall, was founded in 1996 to raise awareness of Scotland's Roman heritage (Antonine Guard n.d.). Recent projects have communicated the importance of this monument to the public (considered further in Chapter 5). These projects include artworks installed close to the line of the wall. At two locations, artists have created stone sculptures of the head of a legionary soldier and a legionary centurion (Antonine Guard n.d.). Auxiliary soldiers are only rarely featured on publicity for Britain's two Roman walls.

There have been attempts to challenge this focus on the primacy of the Roman legionary soldier. The *Hadrian's Cavalry* event was organised by the Hadrian's Wall Management Plan Partnership (the group that manages the World Heritage Site) from April to September 2017. This event, focused at several sites along the wall, included performances of military tactics by assembled Roman auxiliary cavalry re-enactors at the forts at Wallsend, Chesters, Housesteads and Carlisle (Griffiths 2021; Hadrian's Cavalry n.d.). The most impressive single performance was the *Turma: Hadrian's Cavalry Charge*, staged in Carlisle (Bishop and Mills 2021). A squadron of 30 auxiliary cavalry re-enactors undertook manoeuvres described in Roman texts and coordinated exhibitions at museums along the wall focused on the presence of cavalry on Hadrian's Wall (Booth and Nixon 2021).

Many of the legionary groups include a few re-enactors that perform the role of auxiliary soldiers. There are also several auxiliary re-enactment groups. These include the Cohors Quinta Gallorum (Fifth Cohort of Gauls), which is based at South Shields (Arbeia; Tyne and Wear) and named after a military unit that served at this fort (Coh VG n.d.). Another group is the Batavi which reconstructs military and civil life in later Roman Britain and draws upon the identity of an auxiliary infantry unit recruited from the lower Rhine Valley (Batavi n.d.).[3] The Batavi formed one of the most famous of the peoples recruited to serve

in the Roman auxiliaries and are even more well-known because of the discovery of the Vindolanda 'letters', many of which were produced by Batavian units (Hingley 2022, 183).

Ian Robson, who runs a two-person business called Ancient Britain, provides another form of interpretation along Hadrian's Wall (Brown and Robson 2022). Robson is a living history performer rather than a re-enactor. He takes members of the public to sites along Hadrian's Wall while dressed up using modern versions of Romano-British clothing and footwear (Brown and Robson 2022, 131). Robson uses his presentations to illustrate that not all the occupants of the landscape of the wall were Roman soldiers and their camp followers. He observes: 'Having a personal guide, weaving a narrative of the sites and providing the cultural, spiritual, environmental and political context, can significantly increase the public's understanding and appreciation of Hadrian's Wall' (Brown and Robson 2022, 134). Interactions between Roman soldiers and Iron Age people are also addressed at two of the open-air museums visited by the *Ancient Identities* team (Part II).

Legionary soldiers have remained far more prominent in the public gaze, however, than the other people who lived within the frontier landscapes of Britain. As well as their use to publicise Hadrian's Wall, the Antonine Wall and the three Roman fortresses of Britain, legionary re-enactors have been used for decades to attract visitors to the remains of the Roman villas that are displayed to the public across southern Britain, including Fishbourne Roman Palace (West Sussex) and Chedworth Roman Villa (Gloucestershire). The 'Butser Villa' was first constructed in 2002–3 and was renovated and reopened in May 2019 (Chapter 3). A small re-enactment group, the Butser IX Legion, uses this open-air museum as its summer 'headquarters' (Butser IX Legion n.d.).

A photograph on the Butser Legion's website depicts three male legionary re-enactors and two women wearing colourful Roman-inspired dresses standing in front of the reconstructed villa. Another recent photograph shows the same five re-enactors with two male children, also wearing legionary equipment, and a man dressed in more civil-type clothing (Butser IX Legion n.d.). The Butser Legion aims:

> to bring the Roman world alive for you, your family and friends. When you come to visit you can taste food cooked on Roman utensils from a Roman cookbook, find out what a Roman schoolchild would have had to learn, try on Roman armour and if you are tough enough undergo Roman army training (all orders in Latin – we will teach you!).

Roman villas were often viewed as the homes of retired Roman legionary commanders during the nineteenth century (Hingley 2008). This view is no longer accepted as these buildings are now generally seen as the homes of wealthy civilians from Britain or other parts of the empire (Mattingly 2006). The performance of Roman military re-enactments at Butser and the other villas may reinforce the idea in the minds of teachers and children that legionaries often lived across the lands of rural southern Britannia, which was not the case after the period of conquest. We shall see, however, that the interpretation team at Butser also explore some nuanced aspects of living in Roman Britain at this open-air museum (Chapter 6).

Re-enactors aim to broaden their interpretation beyond the military aspects of the province by displaying aspects of everyday life through cooking, industry and Roman fashion. However, most members of the Roman military and the women and children who lived alongside them were stationed across the military areas of the province, particularly across central and western Britain, from the 70s CE onward. The Vicus re-enactment group seeks to provide living history displays that feature military frontier life, including civilians in addition to soldiers. Groups that re-enact Roman civil life outside the military arena, however, seem not to exist. The public prominence of the image of the Roman legionary presumably explains why Roman-themed heritage sites across the south of Britain use Roman military re-enactors and their camp followers to interpret their sites and to draw the public to their sites. Is the public prominence of the image of the legionary soldier an issue of concern?

Diversity and re-enactment

What impression do the Roman military re-enactors who regularly meet together to perform the past across much of Britain present to the public today? Most of the re-enactors I have met over the years speak fluent English, with the occasional Latin word. They communicate the Roman military as an institution that focused on creating order (Hingley 2021b). Because of their background, most legionary re-enactors are from Britain. We know that the Roman military forces were recruited and brought to Britain from across the Roman empire and that soldiers from North Africa, the Near East, and northern and central Europe served in Britain (Hingley 2021b, 321–4). Re-enactors, however, tend to present the image of the Roman military as distinctly 'British'. Many people know from their school education that 'Romans' came to Britain

in the first century and that they then left during the early fifth century (e.g. Department for Education 2014). The people of southern Britain are said to have become Romanised during the three and a half centuries of the occupation, so why should Roman legionary soldiers not speak English?

The re-enactor Robin Brown (Brown and Robson 2022, 130) directly addressed this issue in a thoughtful paper, noting that

> One of the key themes [in academic research and heritage display] of recent years has been to present the diversity of the Romans on Hadrian's Wall, and yet re-enactment struggles to recruit from ethnic minorities whose geographical ancestors contributed to the Roman garrison of Britain – most re-enactors are white middle-aged men.

Perhaps this theme could be addressed by English Heritage in a re-enactment event on the wall. This agency owns and displays many of the most prominent ancient monuments along the frontier and has an ambitious educational agenda.

Dualities in (re)action

This focus on re-enactment provides a clear example of the insistent dualities that drive public displays of Iron Age and Roman heritages in Britain. The suspicion is that the idea of Iron Age living history appeals to a different constituency from the concept of Roman re-enactment (see González-Álvarez and Alonso González 2013). While Roman re-enactors perform and display the ways of life and armed manoeuvres of military communities at forts, towns and villas across southern, western and central Britain, Iron Age living history specialists tend these days to re-enact peaceful settled egalitarian communities living in harmony with nature at small settlements of reconstructed roundhouses.

On occasions, Iron Age warriors meet with Roman legionaries in public displays, although conflicts are rarely staged anymore. Presumably, the idea of Iron Age warriors fighting but ultimately being defeated by superior Roman arms, across England and lowland Wales at least, is not attractive for people wishing to draw inspiration from the ancient past. Boudica remains a popular figure as a fighter against injustice, although people know that she was eventually defeated. The idea of the Iron Age female warrior, exploited by several re-enactment

groups, draws a direct contrast with the male Roman legionary and auxiliary soldiers who undertake performances at Roman monuments. Groups that dress women and children in Roman legionary equipment are clearly challenging the established rules of re-enactment.

Performances of the Roman period project the idea of an organised and hierarchical government with male legionary soldiers imposing the rules over their (sometimes) well-dressed wives and children. Considering the use of Roman legionaries to draw the public to Roman venues and the rules that public agencies are required to impose about health and safety, the pacification of re-enactment performances is entirely understandable. It may serve, however, to suggest to observers a benevolent and supportive occupying force (discussed further in Chapter 8). Across the Roman world, death, maiming, looting, rape and enslavement were regularly the results of war (Fernández-Götz and Roymans 2024). Of course, it is not viable to introduce realistic violence into either Roman military re-enactment or living history at ancient monuments, since all these professional and semi-professional groups and organisations need to abide by strict regulations to protect the public. Re-enactors would also need to take care in communicating unpalatable issues to the public, especially to children. Communicating negative messages about the past would hardly be likely to attract families and school groups to visit.

A common interpretation derived from traditional interpretations of the Roman past is that the conquest of unsettled Iron Age peoples by Roman legionaries and their commanders enabled the settled conditions that created the circumstances under which peoples of southern Britain could become civilised and live in villas and towns (Chapter 1). However, the open-air museums increasingly raise the problematic question of whether this process of conquest and settlement was really a good thing (at all) for the Iron Age people living across southern Britain.

Re-enactment of these two periods has effectively created two cultural packages that react in opposition. We found no indication that re-enactors and living historians perform the lives of Late Iron Age peoples across south-eastern Britain during the time of the *oppida* when quantities of wine and olive oil were imported from the Continent and society was getting less equal as a result of contacts with people from the Mediterranean. Likewise, with a few exceptions, Roman period re-enactors seldom seek to portray life in the very different later Roman period. Archaeologists focus much attention on changes in society and material culture over time. However, re-enactment tends to essentialise each of the two periods of the past, flattening out the concept of cultural change.

The next chapter addresses how community projects have contributed to knowledge and understanding of the Roman past, building on many of the insistent dualities addressed in Chapters 1–4.

Notes

1 http://doi.org/10.15128/r19c67wm84v.
2 This website is now very out of date and the Vicus now communicates events on Facebook (Vicus n.d.).
3 This group, which has changed its name to Batavi Iuniores Britanniciani, remains active.

5

The archaeological community and community archaeology

> The roundhouse is a sustainable building for instructional use explaining the usages of plants and the environment for peoples throughout history and today.
>
> (Business Wales: Welsh Government 2024)

Introduction

Community archaeology is an increasingly important field of practice and research in the UK and overseas (Atalay 2012; Ayán Vila 2021; Dalglish 2013; Hale 2013, 5). Jobs in community archaeology have become increasingly common, elevating the significance of this field of archaeological practice (Roberts, Gale and Welham 2020). The publication of the *Journal of Community Archaeology & Heritage* shows the increasing prominence of community archaeology. What appears remarkable is the scarcity of published research on these projects (for example, see Karl et al. 2014; Maeer 2017; Mitchell and Colls 2020; Nevell 2013). Why is there so little relevant published research?

Many community groups contribute to archaeology by undertaking a range of projects. These initiatives contribute to knowledge of the past, help inform people about archaeology and bring groups of interested individuals together. Community groups that wish to research the historic environment can seek grant support from various sources (Frearson 2018; Hedge and Nash 2016). The most significant feature that has transformed heritage research across the UK, however, is the opportunity for organisations and community groups to apply to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), formerly the Heritage Lottery Fund, for the

resources to create local initiatives. The Channel 4 programme *Time Team* first appeared in 1994, the same year as the foundation of NLHF, causing a massive upswell of public interest in archaeology, which is reflected in the community projects assessed in this chapter.

This chapter focuses on the character of the Iron Age and Roman projects funded with grants from the NLHF, since information about these projects is easily available from this organisation's website (NLHF n.d.). It explores how funding made available to the public has helped to develop new displays, information and interpretations about these ancient times. The focus is on how such projects have drawn upon the tangible and intangible aspects of the Iron Age and Roman periods. An important theme is how the projects help to build ideas of community by informing people about the past of their local area and by bringing people together (see Bowden 2021; Isherwood 2013).

A distinction is drawn below between an 'archaeological community of practice', which includes people employed as archaeologists and heritage managers, and others who draw upon the past but would not necessarily define themselves as archaeologists. It is simplistic to draw this distinction too directly since archaeologists do not form a single bounded group, and the term 'archaeologist' includes many individuals who take an interest in the ancient past without looking for paid employment, as is the case with most members of local archaeological societies and the volunteers who contribute to community projects. There is a strong tradition of local archaeological societies across Britain (Thomas 2010, 7), while the practices of living history and community project funding have created many others who now have considerable experiences of different ways of performing and reconstructing the past.

The NLHF and an archaeological community of practice

The NLHF was founded in 1994 and by 2022 had awarded over £500 million to 26,700 projects across the UK (NLHF n.d.). The NLHF website addresses the strategy for funding organisations and community groups. It notes: 'Celebrating our community heritage can help bring people together, feel pride in where they live and save stories and traditions'. It further notes: 'We fund a broad range of projects that connect people and communities to the national, regional and local heritage of the UK'. The NLHF define community heritage projects as falling into 11 themes: nature, designed landscapes, landscapes and the countryside, oral

history, cultural traditions, community archaeology, historic buildings, museums and libraries, acquiring new objects, commemorations and celebrations, and industrial, maritime and transport (NLHF n.d.).

Of these categories, five are particularly relevant to this chapter:

- *Community archaeology* – involves the active participation of volunteers in archaeological activities, everything from investigating, photographing, surveying to finds processing. Can occasionally include excavation. Sometimes called public archaeology.
- *Historic buildings, monuments and the historic environment* – from houses and mills to caves and gardens. Areas that are connected to history and heritage.
- *Museums, libraries and archives* – making the collections that museums, libraries and archives hold more accessible through new displays, improving public buildings and galleries, or engaging people with interpreting new and existing collections.
- *Acquiring new objects* – help towards the cost of acquiring one-off objects or collections as part of a collections development policy.
- *Commemorations and celebrations* – telling the stories and histories of people, communities, places or events related to specific times and dates.

Some of these categories overlap and we have made some slight amendments to these categories to simplify the analysis of the projects addressed in this chapter.

Tellingly, this list of categories separates community archaeology from other topics, defining it as a single approach that focuses on volunteering to investigate archaeological remains, including photographing, surveying, finds processing and, on occasions, getting involved in excavation. Community archaeology is the only category among the NLHF's 11 categories that mentions volunteering. Tellingly, the definitions of the 'designed landscapes' and 'landscapes and the countryside' do not mention the idea of volunteering. This guidance suggests that community groups often do not have the experience to lead archaeological initiatives without additional professional input. All community groups that plan substantial projects are told to consult and involve appropriate professionals. Therefore, archaeology is treated differently from other categories in the guidance. Why might this be the case?

The wording of this online advice provided a strong impression that a community group interested in archaeology should wait to be invited by an agency or archaeological unit to participate. This policy reflects the

idea that archaeological remains are a non-renewable and potentially fragile resource. Laurajane Smith and Emma Waterton (2009, 4) have observed, however, that 'true' community projects are those created and managed by communities rather than those projects initially promoted by external organisations. Not all community archaeology projects have been managed in an entirely top-down manner (with professionals leading volunteers). In addition, some community groups that sought grants have involved individuals with relevant archaeological training and skills and not all of these consultants have been professional (in the strict meaning of the term). Members of local archaeological societies often have archaeological experience because of their contributions to earlier projects or previous employment as professionals.

An archaeological community of practice

To explore how community archaeology is addressed by the NLHF, we can consider the guidelines produced by the archaeological profession since 2008. These guidelines help explain why the NLHF defines community archaeology to address primarily fieldwork. Fay Simpson and Howard Williams (2008, 74), in a seminal article, 'Evaluating community archaeology in the UK', created a definition of community archaeology that allows the opportunity for many approaches and activities, including 'restoration, field-walking, standing-building survey, school-based projects, finds-training, archive research and excavation'. There has been discussion of the extent and remit of archaeology in several additional surveys and guidance documents. These seek to outline standards for all those involved in community archaeology across the UK. They follow a comparable approach to that adopted by Simpson and Williams in identifying archaeology as a discipline that addresses the tangible elements of ancient heritage, including archaeological remains and artefacts. Aspects of heritage such as the reconstruction of ancient buildings, experimental archaeology, storytelling and living history are excluded from the remit of archaeologists in many of these documents.

The first of the reports was produced by the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) and based on an online survey of community archaeologists (Thomas 2010). The CBA is an archaeological charity that works throughout England and Wales that has long promoted the importance of archaeology to the public. Any member of the public can become a member of the CBA by paying a fee. There was a separate Council for Scottish Archaeology, now renamed Archaeology Scotland (Archaeology Scotland 2024). The CBA's 2010 report, *Community*

Archaeology in the UK, contains recommendations that the groups applying for funding should work closely with bodies such as the NLHF to make sure that community projects involving archaeological activities build into their plans 'recording and research standards', adequate measures for reporting and dissemination of the results and also that they include the provision for 'off-site work such as post-excavation' (Thomas 2010, 50, 61). It observes that voluntary groups 'interact with archaeological heritage in a wide variety of ways', including excavation, photography, attending lectures, lobbying on heritage issues and field walking (Thomas 2010, 5). This document highlights the number of projects underway and explores the relationship between professional archaeologists and volunteers. It focuses on the direct concern that fieldwork, particularly excavation, is undertaken according to correct professional standards (Thomas 2010, 50).

The second report, produced by the NLHF, was titled *Archaeology, Good-Practice Guidance* (HLF 2013) and drew directly upon the CBA's earlier guidance. This document, which is no longer available online, stressed the idea of archaeological remains as a non-renewable resource and focused on fieldwork and excavation. It documented ways in which NLHF funding could help with community archaeology projects and identified how archaeology related to other interests, including historic buildings, sites, parks and landscapes (HLF 2013, 3). Topics addressed included acquiring artefacts for display and the management and display of ancient monuments. The guidance emphasised that the first port of call for community groups is the local authority archaeological adviser (HLF 2013, 4).

These three publications indicate how seriously archaeologists have viewed the changing roles of the profession and emphasise the considerable potential of community projects to increase public access to archaeology. They define archaeology as primarily focusing upon survey, finds work and the occasional involvement of community groups in archaeological excavation, always under professional archaeological supervision.

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) has the remit of providing and encouraging professional standards in the discipline across the UK. To join this institute requires experience and achievements, and there is an annual fee. CIfA (2018) has provided a general statement on community engagement for archaeological projects.

> Community engagement both fosters public understanding and support for the historic environment and adds value to archaeological work. It may include providing talks and presentations,

> guiding walks, arranging conferences, exhibitions, open days and living history events, providing school project work and learning resources, offering work experience and volunteering opportunities, and supporting community archaeology projects.

This guideline extends the remit of archaeologists within the broader field of heritage by including living history events and school project work. The mention of volunteering emphasises CIfA's role in guiding advanced training in archaeology – a focus that is replicated in information included on the current CIFA website (CIfA n.d.). CIfA also has robust policies to discourage commercial archaeological companies from using volunteers on archaeological projects to cut labour costs in order to undercut their competitors.

The CIfA's *Professional Archaeology: A guide for clients* (2015) provides an informative perspective by observing that the social benefits of archaeology can be closely linked to the historic environment:

> [I]n particular benefits for individuals through learning and development and the ability to acquire new skills (such as volunteering). Community strength and cultural identity can be enhanced through contact with the historic environment – in particular through community heritage projects. These projects have the ability to engage diverse groups of people, from refugee groups to the homeless, young offenders and injured service personnel, offering new skills, confidence, the opportunity to become an active citizen and to connect with a shared human past. There is also evidence that engaging with the historic environment can make a significant contribution to community wellbeing and promote social capital, leading to improvement in health, wealth and education. A professional archaeologist can tell you how to approach the investigation of the historic environment with the widest public benefit.

This document extends the meaning of archaeology to a far more ambitious remit, in part by broadening out the perspective to include the historic environment in the ambit of archaeological work (see Hedge and Nash 2016). The mention of refugees, young offenders and retired service personnel in this guidance reflects that some archaeological projects have drawn upon such groups over the past decade (see Defence Archaeology Group 2021). Two of the NLHF-funded projects addressed below have involved refugees and others have aimed to draw in marginalised communities.

The CBA produced a further report in 2018 titled *Supporting Community Archaeology in the UK*. Based on an online survey of community archaeologists, the research drew upon the responses of 866 individuals. The respondents' input to archaeological activities was addressed, including fieldwork, surveying, public engagement, post-excavation, research and the value of archaeology for health and well-being (Frearson 2018, 15). Living history was also mentioned by 27 per cent of the respondents, an increase from the 17 per cent of respondents who mentioned it in a previous CBA survey in 2010. The CBA is currently rebuilding its central role for community archaeology and its website includes information about volunteering and careers in archaeology (CBA 2024). The CBA also advertises the Marsh Community Archaeology Awards. These awards 'showcase excellence in archaeology, celebrating the passion and dedication of individuals and the outstanding contribution of archaeology projects which create social, cultural and environmental benefit'. This organisation also spearheads a 'Reconnecting Archaeology Catalyst for Change' project, which aims to drive positive change through community engagement in archaeology (British Archaeology 2024). Evidence indicates that archaeological approaches to the community are being transformed, which will be reflected in future policy and guidance documents.

Approaching archaeology differently

Despite recent changes in emphasis, the definitions of the scope of archaeological research in the documents and policies reviewed earlier in the chapter place relatively little emphasis on some of the heritage activities used by community groups to draw upon the Iron Age and Roman pasts. NLHF-funded projects have played significant roles in uncovering new information about the Iron Age and Roman pasts, displaying ancient monuments and artefacts and informing local people about the past in their neighbourhoods. Other projects have approaches that fit less simply into the definition of archaeology presented in the guidance documents. A substantial number of projects have included reconstructing Iron Age roundhouses and the performance of living history that draws upon environmental education. Others have drawn directly upon storytelling techniques. Archaeology could play a more innovative role in community work by extending the definition of the discipline to address other issues related to the past that fascinate people across the UK.

The definition of the remit of archaeology in the NLHF guidelines reflects the archaeological focus on past material remains as a

non-renewable resource and the idea that archaeological projects should not contain speculation about ancient beliefs and attitudes. As we have seen, Peter Reynolds felt able only to provide advice on the material and agricultural aspects of Iron Age life when consulted during the late 1970s over the production of the BBC TV programme *Living in the Past* (Chapter 3). There has been a tendency to sideline approaches to the past through living history and storytelling since these practices and methods are often not seen to fit within the remit of archaeology. This narrow focus on methodology helps to explain the narrow definition of the category of community archaeology in the NLHF guidelines.

Archaeology developed from antiquarianism during the nineteenth century by adopting what Alain Schnapp (2002, 140) titled the 'triangulated pillars of archaeological method' – typological, stratigraphic and technological approaches. Schnapp commented that, between 1830 and 1860, the adoption of these coordinated methods enabled archaeologists to demonstrate that earlier stories of the origins of humans were 'occluded … by mythic accounts and popular tale'. Therefore, although archaeology was the product of a long evolution, it became an academic discipline in the broader context of positivist science and the industrialisation of society. From the 1930s onward, excavation and material culture studies became central to the definition of what an archaeologist did, as members of the profession began to focus on working analytically to establish 'evidence', or secure knowledge, of the past, to separate themselves as professionals from the broader field of those interested in the past (Smith and Waterton 2009, 4; Stout 2008). This approach is deeply embedded within archaeological theory and methodology and it constrains the development of the discipline.

Trudy Cole (2015) has noted the impact of a processualist and scientific agenda on the creation of the concept of how archaeology is defined, and that school education often tends to focus on digging, data and archaeological science, establishing the idea of 'facts'. Much of the coverage of archaeology on television, particularly the highly successful programme *Time Team*, has pursued a comparable focus on the past as knowable and archaeologists as experts. From this perspective, community archaeology is defined in narrow terms as part of a broader project that focuses upon creating legitimated archaeological knowledge. This perspective places the archaeologist in a privileged position in controlling the meaning of the past (Smith and Waterton 2009, 2). The guidance documents assessed earlier in this chapter aim to ensure that any excavation is conducted according to professional standards, which is entirely understandable. What is not addressed are the projects that

seek to call upon the past in alternative and more creative or transformative ways.

An alternative approach for archaeologists that Cole (2015, 127–8) champions is to address the intangible aspects of the past in addition to the tangible, and to link this to the concept of contemporary relevance. There is a distinct problem with the idea adopted in archaeology of the scientific 'fact', of archaeological finds as 'evidence' and with the implicit role of the archaeologist as 'expert' rather than as an advisor (Cole 2015, 128). Cole suggests that archaeological education should include 'people's memories, stories and their emotional response to material culture' (Cole 2015, 116). Following this approach, archaeology could become a more broadly defined and inclusive subject that offers interpretations and guidance for all who wish to explore the ancient past (so long as their approaches are tolerant). The concept of the volunteer might also be replaced by an emphasis on joint working and co-producing.

Smith and Waterton (2009, 3) argue that archaeologists should engage with how communities and other groups are creating their heritages. If archaeologists do not engage more fully with such approaches, these authors suggest, they will be left behind by the theoretical and policy developments occurring in the heritage sector. Much of the creative work of communicating the relevance of the past to visitors at the open-air museums that we explore in Part II is undertaken by volunteers with no previous archaeological experience. What do the NLHF-funded projects that drew upon the ancient past suggest? Are there indications of the development through these projects of archaeological initiatives that include people's memories, stories and their emotional responses to material culture? Or has the definition of community archaeology in the NLHF guidance constrained how these ancient pasts have been interpreted and created?

Our survey of NLHF-funded projects suggests that many have emphasised the material/tangible. Indeed, the Iron Age and Roman community projects assessed here recall many of the themes addressed in Chapters 2 and 3, which explored the collection of ancient monuments and open-air museums across Britain. More creative and freeform ideas of the ancient past seem relatively rare among the NLHF-funded projects, and storytelling focusing on the Iron Age tends to rely upon the same themes of communal living and sustainable agriculture that typify the interpretation presented at the open-air museums. Storytelling and living history of the Roman past seem seriously under-represented in the NLHF-funded projects, perhaps because the educational agenda in Britain has emphasised that this period of the past is well known.

This has helped create a prime focus on discovering or elucidating the physical 'evidence' for the past, which is primarily the military and elite culture of Roman Britain, rather than trying to explain how past people lived and thought.

We do not wish to downplay the significance of the projects funded by the NLHF or the work of the archaeologists (both employed and volunteers) involved in these initiatives. These projects have added significant new knowledge and led to the display of ancient monuments and artefacts. This chapter aims to suggest that archaeologists may contribute more directly to the stories and memories people draw from the ancient past. Archaeologists can do more than excavate and record by focusing greater attention on co-producing and communicating the significance of the ancient past.

Archaeology projects supported by the NLHF

This section surveys community projects to illustrate the topics and themes that professional organisations (trusts, units, museums) and community groups have found attractive. Many of these projects fit the general aims of archaeology as a public discipline that focuses on uncovering/excavating, displaying and managing tangible heritage. They mainly focus on discovering new sites, collecting information about the past, managing and interpreting ancient monuments and acquiring and displaying artefacts in museums and heritage centres. A significant number of Iron Age projects, however, involve aspects of living history and environmental education, including the reconstruction of roundhouses. Not surprisingly, considering the guidelines provided for those applying for NLHF funding, projects that address spiritual topics and ethnic concepts of Iron Age/Celtic ancestry are rare.

Uncovering new information about archaeological sites, managing and displaying archaeological sites and making artefacts available for the public to view in museums are all highly significant contributions that NLHF grants have made to the public's appreciation of archaeology. Many significant artefacts reported under the Portable Antiquities Scheme have been acquired by museums for public display using NLHF funding. In addition, many archaeological sites and monuments are better understood, displayed and interpreted because of the availability of these grants.

Figure 5.1 and Table 5.1 feature the 64 projects funded by the NLHF that draw inspiration from the Iron Age and the 113 projects

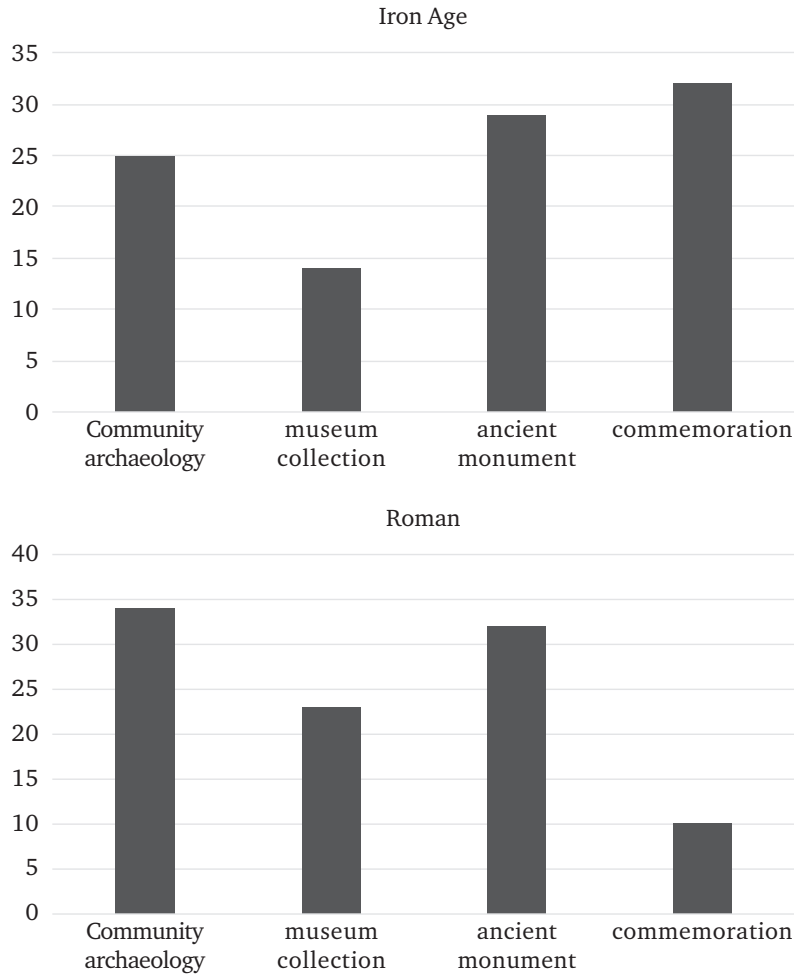

Figure 5.1 Charts showing the percentage of Iron Age and Roman community projects in the four categories (showing percentages of projects on the y axis). © Richard Hingley.

that address Roman topics. The data used to create these illustrations are available from the Online Data Tables 8 and 9.[1] These tables of Iron Age and Roman community projects were compiled by drawing upon information from the NLHF website (NLHF n.d.), searching on the terms 'Iron Age' and 'Celtic' and 'Roman'. The final collection date for this data was in September 2023, and the information assembled should include most of the projects underway and/or completed by this date.[2] The NLHF website often provides a summary of each project, although this information is often limited. As a result, additional searches

Table 5.1 NLHF-funded projects on Iron Age and Roman themes by category

Iron Age-period NLHF-funded projects		
Category	Number of projects	Percentage
Community archaeology	16	25
Museum collections	9	14
Ancient monuments	18.5	29
Commemoration	20.5	32
Total	**64**	
Roman-period NLHF-funded projects		
Category	Number of projects	Percentage
Community archaeology	39	34
Museum collections	26	23
Ancient monuments	36	32
Commemoration	11	10
Unclassifiable	1	
Total	**113**	

on the internet collected further information for all the projects and some information from publications was also collected.

The discussion that follows summarises the information available in the two online data tables. The Iron Age projects include seven in Scotland, seven in Wales and 50 in England. The Roman projects include 10 in Scotland, five in Wales and 96 in England. These projects are divided into the following categories in the analysis below. These categories are modified from those provided in the NLHF guidance (outlined earlier in the chapter):

- *Community archaeology* – investigating, photographing, surveying, finds processing, experimental archaeology and excavation.
- *Making museum collections* more accessible, including new displays and interpretation and acquiring objects for display.
- *Improving access to ancient monuments* – making ancient places more accessible to visitors, managing and interpreting them.
- *Commemorations* and celebrations of cultural traditions – dance, theatre, food, clothing, language, telling stories and histories of people, communities, places or events. Reconstructing roundhouses has formed an important part of several such projects.

The division of the data into these four categories provide a rough classification of the aims of the funding.[3] The classification into four categories

is also quite arbitrary in the case of some of the projects, since it divides experimental archaeology and archaeological training from the telling of stories and the celebration of cultural traditions. The analysis that follows provides a broad indication, however, of how community groups and heritage organisations have drawn upon NLHF funding to develop Iron Age and Roman projects since around 2000.

Significantly, most of the Iron Age and Roman NLHF-funded projects fall into the category that, drawing upon Smith and Waterton (2009, 4), we can define as 'official' (Figure 5.1). Professional organisations – including museums, heritage centres, university departments, archaeological units and local councils – proposed many of these projects. A few projects, led by community groups, involved professional archaeologists who undertook much of the directing of the work and the training for the fieldwork. Ninety per cent of the Roman projects focused on community archaeology, museum collections and ancient monuments and 10 per cent on the category of commemoration. A higher proportion of 32 per cent of the Iron Age projects fall into the category of 'commemoration', which might be taken to indicate that this period of the past attracts a higher proportion of initiatives that are 'unofficial' in Smith and Waterton's terms. The analysis that follows shows that the Iron Age projects in the category of commemoration mainly focus on developing an interpretation of this period as a sustainable and egalitarian past. These projects draw on concepts developed within experimental archaeology and ideas popular at open-air museums (Chapter 3), suggesting that this conception of the Iron Age has become officially sanctioned.

The four categories are now addressed to explore how the NLHF-funded projects have added to experience and knowledge of the past.

Survey and excavation: community archaeology

Community archaeology projects have included the surveying and excavation of several important archaeological monuments, resulting in the dissemination of information to the public and several high-profile publications. These projects are often designed to help inform local communities about the Iron Age and Roman pasts of the areas in which they live and to train local people by improving their knowledge of archaeological techniques. Sometimes, local archaeology groups have directed the work. Several new sites have been located and studied, adding to knowledge of the local archaeology in different parts of the UK.

One significant project assessed the discovery of human remains, apparently resulting from a massacre, in the ditch of the Iron Age hillfort at Fin Cop (Derbyshire). Led by the Longstone Local History Group, this project received a grant from the NLHF to excavate at the hillfort, with archaeological supervision provided by professional archaeologists. It resulted in a detailed publication of this significant research (Waddington et al. 2012). This research is one of several projects that has led to a refocusing on the evidence for violence in the Iron Age (see King 2013). The excavation undertaken with NLHF funding to uncover the remains of an Iron Age chariot burial in Pembrokeshire (Wales) has also produced significant results (Current Archaeology 2019a). Although many chariot burials have been excavated in east Yorkshire, and there is a single example in southern Scotland, this is the first example from Wales. The chariot project, led by the National Museum of Wales, excavated remains that will be displayed to the public in due course.[4] Public involvement in this excavation was impossible as the site required securing from the threat of treasure hunting.

Another significant community project run by the archaeology department of Cardiff University has increased knowledge of the hillfort at Caerau (close to Cardiff, Wales). It began with a training excavation at St Fagans open-air museum in 2011. The excavation team then moved onto the hillfort, uncovering three roundhouses and finding Iron Age artefacts. The work has also involved local young people in designing a new heritage trail across the site, which included an 'Iron Age-derived mural' (Davis and Sharples 2014). The initiative developed into a more ambitious community project funded by several organisations that included local school children and other volunteers in the excavations at the site (Wyatt 2024). Many archaeological community projects recruit retired volunteers who are relatively well-off with high educational achievements (Brown, Miles and Partridge 2018, 11). The work at Caerau drew upon a local community that suffers from significant social and economic deprivation, including high unemployment (Davis and Sharples 2014; Wyatt 2024). It aimed to develop a sense of the importance of place that draws upon the idea that the hillfort was a power centre during the Iron Age. Ambitious plans, also assisted by funds from the NLHF, have involved the construction of facilities for tourists and school groups.

We have seen that Iron Age settlement sites, as opposed to hillforts, are poorly represented in those available for the public to visit (Chapter 2). Several NLHF-funded projects have excavated such sites, helping to balance a bias in heritage provision. The excavation of

a Roman villa and Iron Age settlement with roundhouses discovered in advance of a housing development at Fane Road (Peterborough, Cambridgeshire) by Oxford Archaeology East led to a community project that uncovered traces of an Iron Age settlement; the participants were trained in excavation techniques and find recording (Fairbairn 2014). Archaeologists from the University of Exeter directed the ambitious survey and excavation work at Ipplepen (Devon). This project, funded by several organisations, explored an Iron Age and Roman settlement. The grant supported the involvement of local volunteers in survey work and community workshops (University of Exeter n.d.).

An innovative community-led project run by the volunteers at the Trimontium Trust surveyed the Iron Age hillfort at Burnswark Hill (Dumfries and Galloway) and the surrounding Roman siege camps, recording a dense scatter of Roman projectile points that indicate the sieging of the hillfort by the Roman military (Reid and Nicholson 2019). The new information provided by this survey contributed significantly to knowledge of the Roman invasion of northern Britain (Hingley 2022, 223–4). The national media have featured Roman excavation supported by the NLHF. The excavation of the impressive Roman mosaic at Boxford (Berkshire), which shows scenes from Greek mythology, is a high-profile example (Current Archaeology 2019b). Over 100 local volunteers helped excavate the mosaic, supervised by archaeologists from the Cotswold Archaeology unit.

The Roman villa at Liss (Hampshire) was found during road construction, and an NLHF-funded excavation was undertaken by a community group with archaeological support (Isherwood 2013; Liss Archaeological Group 2016). Long-running community survey and excavation work at the Roman town of Caistor St Edmund (Norfolk), initially led by Nottingham University, has been supported since 2014 by two grants from the NLHF, leading to a much more informed understanding of the site (Bowden 2021).

Making ancient monuments accessible

Projects that have made ancient monuments more accessible and helped to interpret them for visitors also have a significant role. Community groups have often co-operated with local authorities, trusts and archaeological units in the projects that fall within this category (forming 29 per cent of the Iron Age projects and 33 per cent of the Roman projects). Iron Age hillforts are prominent in the sites displayed for the public (Chapter 2) and several initiatives have provided access and interpretation to such

sites. The 'Discover our Hillfort Heritage' project in the Northumberland National Park, part-funded by the NLHF, produced an impressive record of the hillforts of the area, including professional archaeological surveys. A high-quality publication aimed at interested members of the public resulted (Oswald, Ainsworth and Pearson 2006). The 'Hillforts and Heather' project focused on providing access and interpretation for several hillforts in north Wales that are not in guardianship (Gale 2011). Environmental work to help conserve and manage the archaeological remains and nature interests in this area involved archaeology students and local volunteers. Another project, fronted by Cheshire West and Chester Council, has addressed the 'Hillforts of Cheshire's Sandstone Ridge', improving access to and management of six hillforts (Garner 2016). This project included landscape analysis, excavation and paleoenvironmental investigation and involved university academics, archaeological consultants and volunteers.

NLHF funding has been provided for access and interpretation work by the local councils at Danebury Hillfort (Hampshire) and Ham Hill Hillfort (Somerset). At Bukland Rings (Hampshire), a local youth group undertook access and interpretation work on the hillfort. The excavation and display of the interior of the highly impressive Iron Age broch at Clachtoll (Assynt, Sutherland) was led and managed by a local community group, Historic Assynt, that was concerned about the damage caused by coastal erosion (Carvers and Sleight 2018; Clachtoll Broch n.d.). Including large-scale archaeological work supervised by the AOC Archaeology Group, this project has protected the broch from the sea and enabled visitors to gain new insights into the imposing remains of this substantial broch (Figure 2.3).

Several NLHF-funded projects have managed, conserved and interpreted Roman-period ancient monuments. Projects focused on Hadrian's Wall have recruited local volunteers to undertake research, assist with excavation and help manage the remains of this Roman frontier work. Hadrian's Wall has a high public profile and a long-term management structure (Collins and Shaw 2021, 179–80). The latest project was the 'Hadrian's Wall Community Landscape Project' (Wallcap), which received substantial funding in 2018. Led by archaeologists from Newcastle University, the volunteers helped with the investigation, understanding and protection of sites along the wall, focusing on places with identified risks to the archaeological remains. Additional research explored the locations to which robbed stones from the wall were taken when it was dismantled, including local houses, farms, fields, churches and castles (Collins and Harrison 2024; Collins and Shaw 2021, 181–2;

Newcastle University n.d.). Over 300 volunteers were registered with Wallcap by 2021 and participated in over 100 activities.

Making artefacts accessible

Nine of the NLHF-funded projects have focused on the display of Iron Age artefacts or collections in museums. Museums and heritage sites can apply to other agencies to obtain the funds to develop galleries and displays – therefore, our data collection for this theme will be far from complete. In addition, some of the projects that fall into this category were supported with grants from several sources. Funds from the NLHF have helped museums display the Iron Age coin hoards from Wickham Market (Suffolk) and Malpas (Cheshire), and the collection of weapons from South Cave (East Riding of Yorkshire). The innovative displays of the Iron Age at the museums at Cirencester (Gloucestershire) and St Albans (Hertfordshire), already discussed in Chapter 2, have also been substantially updated with grants from the NLHF. The artefacts from the warrior burial from North Bersted (Sussex) were displayed by the Novium Museum (Chichester) in a temporary exhibition that explained that this individual might have fought alongside Commius during Julius Caesar's wars in Gaul (Novium Museum 2022). This exhibition helped to communicate a vision of the Iron Age that contrasts with the idea of a settled and egalitarian past. Although the exhibition has closed, the Novium Museum still displays the remains from the warrior burial, providing an insight into the Iron Age background to the more highly visible and better-known remains of the Roman *civitas* capital at Chichester.

Twenty-six NLHF-funded projects have displayed Roman artefacts and collections, including eight coin hoards. Roman coins are far more commonly discovered by metal-detecting than Iron Age examples, explaining the predominance of Roman coin hoards over those of the Iron Age. Several other notable individual items have been acquired with its support. These include the display of the Ilam Pan from Staffordshire at the British Museum (Breeze and Allason-Jones 2012) and the tombstone of the first-century auxiliary cavalryman Insus, son of Vodullius, at the Lancashire County Museum (see Tomlin 2018, 63–4). Museums and ancient monuments that have received funding include the Roman Baths at Bath (north-east Somerset), Brading Roman Villa (Isle of Wight), Chedworth Roman Villa (Gloucestershire), Fishbourne Roman Palace (West Sussex), Maryport Roman Fort (Cumbria) and Vindolanda (Northumberland). All these venues have a high public profile and

help to inform visitors, including school groups, about the Roman past (Chapter 2).

Commemoration and cultural traditions

This category includes telling the stories and histories of people, communities, places or events related to specific times and dates. Iron Age projects that fall into the category form 32 per cent of the total, compared with 10 per cent of the Roman projects. Archaeological knowledge of the Iron Age is (perhaps) less well established than the information we possess for the Roman past, reflecting the biased nature of the classical texts that address 'barbarian' peoples. This relative lack of understanding of the Iron Age may enable some community groups to obtain NLHF funding for projects that appear to be more experimental or less specifically focused on ancient objects and structures. The focus on egalitarian and sustainable living, common at the Iron Age open-air museums (Chapter 3), has helped sanction the idea of applying for funds to reconstruct roundhouses, which often form the tangible element of projects that aim to teach children about environmental sustainability.

Ten funded projects have included the reconstruction of roundhouses and, in most cases, the buildings form the focus for educational initiatives. At St Fagans, close to Cardiff, an Iron Age 'farmstead' was reconstructed with NLHF support in 2016–7. This small settlement, based on an excavated site with two roundhouses (on Anglesey), is advertised as a public attraction and an educational facility. The website (Business Wales: Welsh Government 2024) comments that:

> Around the building will be a wild garden growing ancient local herbs, this will encourage biodiversity whilst being simultaneously educative. The garden will be used and integrated into an education package that ties in with [Welsh] national curriculum themes, but has huge potential beyond this. The focus will be the Iron Age – a critical turning point for Welsh heritage. The roundhouse is a sustainable building for instructional use explaining the usages of plants and the environment for peoples throughout history and today.

The roundhouses at other venues form part of ventures that enable pupils to acquire field skills and artistic experience. At Herd Farm (Leeds, Yorkshire), a group of three Iron Age roundhouses have been reconstructed with NLHF funding at a residential and activity centre

that includes a range of prehistoric activities aimed at school pupils that are 'conducive to understanding and appreciating the challenges of prehistoric life and the knowledge, skills and ingenuity required to survive over 2,000 years ago' (Herd Farm n.d.). One prominent example of an open-air venue (not strictly a museum) with reconstructed roundhouses is Celtic Harmony Camp. At this cluster of seven small roundhouses, NLHF funding has been used to provide an education centre for visiting school children linked to learning, displaying ancient objects, performances and exhibitions (Celtic Harmony n.d.). Bushcraft training and archery are also popular activities at this venue, and the visiting children are encouraged to dress as warriors.

The focus on plants, ecological farming and bushcraft activities are familiar from the open-air museums that display the Iron Age. Other NLHF-funded projects feature comparable themes. BODS Outdoor Educational Charity gained a grant to run the 'Food and Fire' project. This involved activities in Wernee Woods (Hereford and Worcester) that examined how Iron Age people lit fires, stored food, foraged for edible plants and fished (Hereford Times 2010). The School of Ancient Crafts in Edinburgh ran a project titled 'Farming and food for fashion in Iron Age Scotland', to explore with local children how 'Iron Age Celts' worked the land by cultivating and planting (Heritage Fund 2014).

Only a few of the Iron Age projects seek more directly to tell the stories and histories of people, communities, and places – approaches that adopt a more creative and speculative idea of the past. Yr Hyddgen Community Theatre Group obtained a grant for their project 'The Heroic People of the Silures (Mae Pobl Arwrol y Syllwg)'. This project included a 'series of Iron Age activities and sports', performed by the Yr Hyddgen troop for school groups to learn about 'our ancestors' (Yr Hyddgen 2021; Yr Hyddgen n.d.). The Silures were an Iron Age people (or tribe) of southern Wales who valiantly resisted the Roman conquest of their lands for several decades during the mid-first century CE (Hingley 2022). The online information about the Iron Age NLHF-funded projects suggests that communities applying for grants usually avoid direct references to ancestry and pagan spirituality. The idea of an ancestral 'Celtic' past might raise concerns about nationalist sentiments. The absence of reference to pagan beliefs reflects current societal concerns about these religious practices (see Hutton 2013). The idea of violence is evidently not attractive to those seeking NLHF funding. The reference to Iron Age warriors and Roman invaders included in the publicity for some of these projects draws more upon living history approaches than the tradition of armed combat that used to dominate re-enactment (Chapter 4).

Roman projects that focus on the theme of commemoration are far less frequent than those that feature the Iron Age. The School of Ancient Crafts in Edinburgh received a grant from the NLHF for a project on 'Romans in Scotland', which organised three workshops for schools that focused on making Roman shoes (School of Ancient Crafts 2022). This project contrasts with the School of Ancient Crafts' Iron Age workshops, which focused on 'Farming, food and fashion in Iron Age Scotland' and 'Iron Age citizen archaeology'. The MBC Art Wellbeing CIC group in Sunderland (Tyne and Wear) obtained NLHF funding to support Roman-inspired workshops, including repairing clothes and making garments, cooking using left-overs, using sustainable materials, creating ceramic pots and containers and crafting reusable wax writing tablets (MBC Arts Wellbeing CIC 2023). Both the School of Ancient Crafts and MBC's projects draw upon expertise of the archaeologists from Vindolanda.

The most ambitious and innovative project with a Roman theme is 'Rediscovering the Antonine Wall', funded since 2017 with a substantial grant from the NLHF (Jones 2021; Weeks 2020). This project was organised by the five local authorities and coordinated by Historic Environment Scotland (Jones 2021). The Antonine Wall was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 2013 and now forms part of the trans-national Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site (which also includes the Roman limes (frontiers) in Germany and Hadrian's Wall). Substantial remains of the Antonine Wall survive, although this monument is less well known than its southern counterpart, Hadrian's Wall. There has been a considerable effort to promote the Antonine Wall, of which the 'Rediscovering the Antonine Wall' project is the latest (Jones 2021, 13–21).

Several events raised the profile of the Antonine Wall with the Scottish public. The first of the annual 'Big Roman Week', in August 2017, included guided walks, museum exhibitions and talks (Big Roman Week 2017). The annual community conference commenced in 2018 to 'celebrate the engagement and involvement of communities along the Wall' (Antonine Wall n.d.). This conference included sessions on handling Roman artefacts and a re-enactment display by the Antonine Guard re-enactment group. This 'rediscovering' project involves communities along the Roman frontier in developing ways to commemorate the significance of the monument. These activities, 'led by a 21st-century "Legion" of 300 local volunteers', involve 30 community-designed projects. Examples include constructing Roman-themed play spaces, the creation of replica stone slabs carved as copies of Roman inscribed stones found along the wall, the creation of artworks based on the image

of the legionary soldier and the filming of community videos (Jones 2021, 12–21; Weeks 2020, 460–2).

The four replica stone slabs that are to be placed along the wall are careful copies of the Roman distance slabs (Weeks 2020, 459–60). These commemorative stones help locals and visitors to learn about the Antonine Wall and are intended to encourage people to visit sections of the monument that are in the care of Historic Environment Scotland and to explore the collection of Roman artefacts displayed at museums. The programme of work also includes projects that seek to involve refugees and asylum seekers currently living along the wall (Weeks 2020, 461). Patricia Weeks notes that some of these people have travelled from the same areas of the world that supplied auxiliary soldiers for the Antonine Wall, including Syria and North Africa. Weeks writes that the wall is being used to unite people when once it divided them. This project also works with the idea of increasing the sense of pride and ownership in the area.

There is a clear contrast between the aims and methods of the 'rediscovering' project and many of the other NLHF-funded initiatives that have addressed the Romans. Most of the projects funded by the NLHF have more conventional aims, including the excavation, surveying, management and display of archaeological sites and acquiring and displaying artefacts. The Antonine Wall work focuses on promoting knowledge of the monument and seeking to increase the communities' sense of ownership, using some less directly archaeological approaches.

The recent 'Gateway to Britannia' project, run by English Heritage at Richborough Roman Fort (Kent), adopted a comparable agenda. This project had additional sources of funding, but the NLHF grant was used to engage local schools and to involve the Kent Refugee Action Network in work on the site (English Heritage n.d.e). The aim was to address 'the rich heritage and diversity' of Roman Richborough, supporting English Heritage's inclusive agenda for their sites. The main methods adopted were more traditional, however, since this project included improvements to the onsite museum and the reconstruction of a section of rampart, a wooden gateway and a tower from the early fort.

Communities and Iron Age/Roman dualities

The focus of many of these NLHF projects has been top-down, although many have included community groups in their activities. The sustained effort of archaeologists to create communities of practice by issuing

guidelines has served to maintain the idea of the 'expert' in a way that is not necessarily particularly helpful to our discipline. Archaeology usually serves in many of these projects to focus on the definition of methods and theories that aim to divide the past from the present, looking for the meaning of the past by attempting to understand as much as possible about how it actually was (or may have been). This concept of archaeological 'knowledge' has limited the potential for speculation and the opportunity to communicate to the public that archaeological knowledge is contested and constantly transforming. The archaeologist is viewed as the specialist who has the training, advanced knowledge and methodology to interpret the past, a skill that non-professionals cannot (apparently) fully achieve without a considerable outlay of effort and sustained training. This position may be dividing many archaeologists and heritage professionals who are seeking to change the approaches that we adopt to the interpretation of the Iron Age and Roman pasts from the educationalists and volunteers who work to help inform school children and adults about life in the ancient past.

The dualities addressed in Chapter 1 find examples in many of the community projects addressed in this chapter. For example, the Iron Age is envisaged as a relatively peaceful period in which people occupied timber roundhouses and were in harmony with the landscape, collecting natural foods and respecting their surroundings. Only a few of these projects explored ideas of conflict and ritual. The Roman projects tend to focus on uncovering and displaying military sites and villas, although some initiatives have uncovered lower-status sites. It is important to emphasise that we do not intend to direct criticism at the use of NLHF funding to make archaeological monuments and artefacts available to local people and visitors. Community archaeology has made a highly significant contribution through the discovery and dissemination of new knowledge of archaeological sites and the display of significant artefacts. We should seek, however, to communicate to the public that what we can say about the ancient past is regularly contested, and explain that our interpretations of the past often changes. Another important aim is to try to communicate the ancient past to individuals and communities in a way that stimulates their interests.

Some challenging initiatives might be possible to help develop interpretations of the past. For example, might it be possible to construct an open-air museum, perhaps in Wales, that communicates the ways that Iron Age religion is understood today by diverse communities? Archaeologists and heritage interpreters could work together on this topic to create an imaginative approach that might also draw in

contemporary pagans. The enduring focus on Roman military life along Hadrian's Wall could be moderated by the building of an open-air museum that reconstructed life on a local roundhouse settlement. The open-air museum at Brigantium, which used to serve this function, closed several years ago, but was too far from popular sections of the wall to attract sufficient visitors. Locating such a new venue close to the main Roman sites along the wall, however, might prove quite a challenge.

Part I of this book has explored a variety of ways that information about the past has been communicated to the public and the role of archaeologists, heritage managers, re-enactors and community groups in these activities. It has also focused attention on the Iron Age and Roman venues and some of the displays of artefacts that are accessible to the public. Part II develops a different perspective that focuses more directly on how the past is remade through performances and interpretation at Iron Age and Roman heritage venues across Britain.

Notes

1 http://doi.org/10.15128/r19c67wm84v.
2 Some NLHF-funded projects that focus on Roman topics form part of larger initiatives that will not necessarily have been picked up by the methodology used here. The amount of information available on the NLHF's website and on the internet for projects predating around 2000–5 is often very limited. Where we have not been able to locate additional information about these projects, it has not been included in the online data tables or the analysis below.
3 Some NLHF-funded projects have been divided into halves to calculate the overall figures in the diagrams. This reflects that these projects have aims that span two of the four categories used in the classification. For example, several projects included survey work at an archaeological site while providing access and interpretation. In the few cases where there was insufficient information to determine the category for a project, it was excluded from the analysis.
4 Adam Gwilt, personal communication, February 2020.

Part II
Sensing place and time: ethnographic approaches

Kate Sharpe, Thomas Yarrow and Richard Hingley

> The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites … that are in themselves incompatible. (Foucault 1984, 6).

In Part I we have explored the ancient monuments and open-air reconstructions that represent the Iron Age and Roman periods. In Part II we have a very different aim. Building on the work of Pierre Nora (1989), we highlight how authorised understandings of heritage venues as being 'removed from time' conceal how official pasts are creatively reworked by managers, visitors and others (see Smith and Waterton 2012). This is apparent in the ways that particular guardianship sites (hillforts, brochs, Roman forts, villas) and the reconstructed roundhouses common at open-air museums across Britain have been recreated and brought to life through re-enactment and living history. Informed by ethnographic methods and sensibilities, we highlight the everyday experiences of those involved in curating and presenting these pasts.

Developing Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia' (Foucault 1984; Foucault 2005), we highlight how these sites can function as places 'outside' society, revealing things to people through the distance they establish from their 'normal' life in 'the present'. The same places, however, can also simultaneously work in directions that are opposite to escapism, by reinforcing ways of living and personal and family traditions. Rather than assume that the past is used (or works) in a singular way, we seek to trace the multiple ways in which connections and disconnections occur at different sites, through the practices of different people. We investigate how choreographed visitor experiences are variously associated with coupling and uncoupling of 'past' and

'present', and explore the range of ways in which temporality is 'staged' through these heritage arenas.

The observations in Part II are based on fieldwork and ethnographic interviews at five heritage venues visited by Kate Sharpe and also visits to the London Mithraeum by Richard Hingley (Table 1.2). Sharpe also visited a wider range of Iron Age and Roman heritage venues and events across England, Scotland and Wales as part of the *Ancient Identities* project. However, these chapters mainly focus on the interviews and experiences at four of these six venues. Sharpe spent several days at these four sites, as noted in Table 1.2, exploring the context of heritage interpretation, undertaking visitor surveys and conducting semi-structured interviews (with informed consent) with heritage managers, educational specialists, curators, volunteers, guides, archaeologists, teacher trainers, re-enactors and independent heritage consultants. In total, 79 people were interviewed, resulting in 38.5 hours of recorded discussion.

The six venues were chosen to encompass sites focusing specifically on the Roman period (Vindolanda, London Mithraeum, Bath) and the Iron Age (Castell Henllys, the Scottish Crannog Centre), with one multiperiod site (Butser Ancient Farm). These six case studies offer a range of presentations related to the Iron Age and Roman past, some with standing remains, some with reconstructions and some with impressive museums. Each has a unique history and is managed by a different type of organisation, including a charitable trust, a not-for-profit community interest group, a local council, a national park and a global financial company – each with its own specific agenda and objectives.

The interviews were designed to explore practices and performances at the open-air museums and ancient monuments (see Jones and Yarrow 2022, xi). Selected quotes are presented and pseudonyms have been used for the interviewees (in Chapters 6 and 7) to maintain anonymity. We have aimed to reproduce the language of the interviews as faithfully as possible but, for increased clarity, have sometimes lightly edited them. These visits provide a snapshot only, some during a single visit. Even those involving deeper and more prolonged engagement over a week or two provide insight into the site only at a specific moment in its history. Heritage places are not static locations. They are dynamic enterprises, responding to seasonal demands and constantly evolving and there have been changes of management, policy and procedure at several sites since the fieldwork was undertaken. These transformations will certainly have continued beyond the lifespan of our project, particularly as venues adapted to survive the pandemic of 2020–1.

In addition to the interviews, observations of the uses of the landscape were made at all the venues. A phenomenological approach was used to evaluate the visitor experience of reaching the site and following the (sometimes choreographed) journey around it. Particular attention was given to physical transitions between the present and past and, for multiperiod sites, the boundaries between periods. Also noted were methods used to enhance the visitor experience through physical interpretation panels, leaflets and other printed material, and digital interpretation, as well as through human chaperones in the form of guides, living history actors and re-enactors.

In all cases, the aim was to understand the focus and coverage, the key messages conveyed, and the methods used, including storytelling, demonstration, and hands-on activities. Presentations varied widely, with some venues offering the opportunity to interact with costumed individuals firmly set in their own past world and others opting for uniformed staff presenting a contemporary, more distanced account, allowing for explanations of archaeological discovery and reconstruction. Interviews with staff and visitors revealed how these many different approaches had developed over time.

In Chapter 6, we focus on the role of physical places at various Iron Age and Roman venues in creating connections and disconnections with the past.

6
Places apart and within: observations of a time traveller

> You're about to start out on an adventure. You're about to travel back in time. At Castell Henllys, the Iron Age isn't remote. It's close enough to see it, touch it and smell it.
>
> (Castell Henllys, welcome panel)

Introduction: worlds within worlds

When Kate Sharpe visited, Castell Henllys was accessed via a narrow lane, winding deep into a leafy valley. In the car park, a welcome panel sets the tone by mentioning the start of an adventure. Guided by signs, would-be time travellers follow a wooded path to the visitor centre. The hillfort is then just a five-minute walk away across what guides describe as a 'very special bridge'. Most visitors cross oblivious to the powers of this 'Bridge of Time', but all school children are trusted with its secret – raise your right arm and shout your name loudly enough and special energetic resonances will transport you to the past – on the 'other side' is the world of 300 BCE. Moving into the 'past' they find themselves in woodland on a rough track that winds upwards around the spur of land on which the original hillfort was built. At the top, the trees give way to meadow and the trail turns toward the entrance, the reconstructed gates of the Iron Age fort.

Whether the end point is a monument or a fully reconstructed environment, a critical part of the visitor experience is the journey undertaken to reach it. As at Castell Henllys, physical movements through space are often related to symbolic movements in time, for instance in the transition between present and past and in heritage discourses that

envisage the visitor experience as one of 'time travel' (see Shanks and Tilley 1993, 9). Material markers that divide the inside from the outside of a site are likewise frequently presented as points of temporal transition from today to yesterday.

Within the site, the sense of isolation and immersion in another time can be further enhanced by the 'natural' landscape of the setting. Heritage venues on hilltops, in valleys, peninsulas or even on islands can exist as worlds apart, both geographically and chronologically. Additional screening, either naturally cultivated (woodland, hedges), or built (high fences), help to keep the past in and the present out. Gateways and bridges can also generate a transitional moment – the crossing of a threshold – providing a physical as well as psychological marker for those seeking to immerse themselves in the past and exclude contemporary 'reality'. This is equally true of open-air sites and museums, where architecture, design and choreography of visitors around the displays all play a significant role. At all venues, how information is conveyed also impacts the visitor experience – interpretation panels, guided tours and demonstrations can be deployed in ways that both exclude and include the present to different degrees.

Our exploration of the various intersections of space and time takes inspiration from Foucault's (1984) conceptualisation of 'heterotopias', which foregrounds the significance of spaces that are discursively 'other'. In his analysis, these include a range of places that are 'worlds within worlds' – spaces that variously reflect and transform the wider society and world in which they are embedded. In relation to these spaces, Foucault (1984, 6) highlights how physical entrances take on metaphorical significance:

> Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in one must have certain permission and make certain gestures.

Once the visitor enters, the heterotopic space performs a symbolically significant function in relation to the space beyond it. A heterotopian space is not just a place to 'escape' from the 'real' world beyond. It arises from dissatisfaction with that wider world and provides a literal and symbolic space from which to know this reality differently. Though the

contrast between the micro and macrocosmic versions of society can take various forms, heterotopias frequently have temporal dimensions. Foucault (1984, 6) stated:

> Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time – which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronologies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time.

Though Foucault raises important questions about the role of heterotopias and their relationship to modern time, his argument quickly closes these down in this broad diagnosis. Modern time is not the object of his enquiry, though assumptions about its nature and significance are central to his own analysis (Bear 2014).

In a broad-ranging account of the anthropology of modern time, Bear highlights how these broader conceptual orientations elide empirical and ethnographic questions which their own work helps to foreground. Highlighting the heterochrony of modern time, she aims to 'chart the effects of this diversity in various social situations' (Bear 2014, 19). This also involves paying attention to the more-than-human configurations through which such experiences of time are literalised: 'We argue that the act of working in and on time involve: an encounter with the material world; the limits of the body; multiple tools; and co-ordinations of diverse rhythms and representations' (Bear 2014, 20). In a related way, Macdonald (2013, 80) urges attention to the affective dimensions of encounters with heritage and to the everyday ways in which the past is experienced through these sites:

> The past is not only discussed and thought about, it is also materialised in bodies, things, buildings and places. It is felt, experienced and expressed through objects such as ruined buildings, monuments and flared trousers or the marks of wear on old furniture; and practices such as commemorative rituals, historical reenactment, eating a sun-warmed peach or hearing a familiar melody.

Putting these ethnographic approaches in conversation with that of Foucault, we open out the concept of heterotopia to frame a series of empirical questions. Through a focus on specific Iron Age and Roman heritage sites, we explore how these emerge as sites that are set apart but connected to the wider world in which they exist. Our account pays

particular attention to the temporal dimensions of these sites and the ways in which Roman and Iron Age pasts unfold reflexive possibilities and ways to engage with the present.

In the following examples, we consider how several heritage venues and museums establish 'time bubbles', creating and isolating past worlds and how these can be both remote and yet very present. A wide range of approaches was encountered during our visits. Our account highlights how different sites materialise and manipulate spatial relationships to create different articulations of time, in particular, through various juxtapositions of 'past' and 'present'.

Connecting to the past

Not all ancient monuments are created equal. To visit some sites requires a singular intent and physical effort – others might be stumbled upon during a walk in the park. Some are spectacular – in scale or ingenuity – while others comprise modest rows of stones or faint bumps in the landscape. Many are open to all. Others have controlled, sometimes costly, access and may be entirely hidden from public view. What each of these sites share, however, is their perception as locations where past communities once lived, worked, fought, or died. People inhabited these spaces, made them into places and left behind a mark that has endured into the present. By visiting these sites and by handling the objects associated with them, adult visitors, school children and, indeed, excavators may feel that they are experiencing a direct connection with the people who built and used them, who buried and commemorated their dead, or who gathered to perform ceremonies or fight battles. In occupying the same spaces, 'standing in their shoes' and perhaps gazing at the same views, current generations are able to feel closer to those who came before.

Such intersections of time and space have been termed 'chronotopes', defined by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 84, as cited by Basso 1984, 44–5) as follows:

> [P]oints in the geography of a community where time and space intersect and fuse. Time takes on flesh and becomes visible for human contemplation; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time and history and the enduring character of a people … Chronotopes thus stand as monuments to the community itself, as symbols of it, as forces operating to shape its members' images of themselves.

People involved in archaeological excavations at ancient sites experience such connections, when excavating ancient structures or handling uncovered artefacts. For instance, Lucas reports an observation made to him by archaeologist Mark Knight that: 'every time we excavate a feature or site, it is as though we are re-excavating it, we are repeating an act maybe thousands of years ago in the same place' (Lucas 2001, 202). A connection to the distant past opens up through the repetition of the same act in the same place.

Managed 'open-air museums', which aim to display the past through reconstructed buildings, provide an alternative for those wishing to visit the past, either to find their roots, perhaps involving kinship and ideas of descent, or perhaps in relation to a national or cultural identity. Others may seek to further their knowledge of past ways of being, possibly in response to an emergent sense of environmental crisis or simply to escape from the modern world. Open-air museums focusing on the Iron Age are particularly common in Britain, the relatively small number of Roman-period examples perhaps reflecting the greater prevalence (and prominence) of extant Roman monuments (Chapter 2). A very small proportion of these open-air museums, including Vindolanda Roman Fort in the north of England and Castell Henllys in south Wales, are built around, or on top of, archaeological sites and so provide a relationship to ancient places similar to that of *in situ* monumental remains. Others, such as Butser Ancient Farm (Hampshire), are set in more accessible locations and deliberately located away from any archaeology, since it is often considered inappropriate to reconstruct ancient buildings on top of archaeological remains (Bidwell, Miket and Ford 1988). At these sites, the absence of 'place value' is compensated for by elaborately reconstructed worlds, often including inhabitants and livestock, to help visitors make the leap from present to past.

Living history performances at museums, heritage sites and at open-air museums help visitors to imagine the past (Bishop 2013; Kidd 2011). Iron Age open-air museums are brought to life by costumed guides, educators and re-enactors who bring the public face to face with performances of the past, while Roman military re-enactors often draw the public to Roman sites (Chapter 4). Many of these venues employ guides to work with visiting groups. Images on the websites for Butser Ancient Farm, the Scottish Crannog Centre and Castell Henllys show people of differing ages involved in a range of activities, from cooking and building to crafts and military drills. Those involved in performing Iron Age living history at open-air museums may often seek an encounter with a world that is less hierarchical and centralised than the world that

we live in, while Roman re-enactors appear rather more like modern people in their ordered and hierarchical performances. The performance of ancient activities at monuments and open-air museums, both Iron Age and Roman, physically locates these reconstructed memories in the contemporary landscape of Britain.

The following sections present detailed accounts of heritage venues that we explored between 2016 and 2019, including our own experiences and observations and comments captured during interviews with staff, volunteers and visitors. We begin with two sites that have intimate physical connections to past communities but present these to visitors in very different ways.

Into the past at Castell Henllys

In south-west Wales, the reconstructed Iron Age settlement of Castell Henllys in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park attracts thousands of visitors and many school parties every year. Comprising four roundhouses and a granary, it is unique for an Iron Age site in Britain in being situated directly over the footprint of the original hillfort, excavated by Harold Mytum over a period of more than 35 years, starting in the 1980s (Chapter 3). Reconstructions began soon after, and the site was run as a visitor attraction by entrepreneur, Hugh Foster. Unlike other reconstructions, such as that of Peter Reynolds at Butser Ancient Farm, where houses were minimally furnished because of lack of evidence, Foster aimed for a 'lived-in' look with replica artefacts, furs, skins and textiles and the site provided a stage for public events around the dates of Celtic festivals.

Mytum notes, regarding Foster's original reconstruction: 'Modern activity was placed in suspension, a mixture of re-created ancient and clearly twentieth century elements' (Mytum 2013, 94). The roundhouses at Castell Henllys were reconstructed based on the excavated remains, using experimental archaeology to fill gaps in the available knowledge. Foster was also keen to focus on the dramatic, mystical and military elements in contrast to the domestic and agricultural emphasis of Reynolds at Butser Ancient Farm (Chapter 3).

The history of the construction and management of the site has impacted upon its current display, designed to illustrate life in around 300 BCE. Castell Henllys now has a sedimented archaeological history with two main phases of occupation and use – Iron Age and modern. The modern phase, although far shorter than the ancient, is now part of the site's history. This clearly has material dimensions. Buildings and

Figure 6.1 The magic 'Bridge of Time', leading to the Iron Age at Castell Henllys. Photographed by Kate Sharpe, 2018.

structures are regularly modified and repaired and two of the reconstructed roundhouses were replaced in 2017 and 2018 after standing for well over three decades. The physical remains of the original reconstructions were excavated before new roundhouses were built (Mytum and Meek 2020). Castell Henllys is one of the many places across Europe that form a focus for performances of Iron Age life.

Having crossed the magical bridge (Figure 6.1) and made their way up the ramparts to the reconstructed timber gateway, visitors gain their first view of the Iron Age world of Castell Henllys, with its roundhouses, grain store and oddly dressed inhabitants, all enclosed within the still substantial earthworks of the original settlement. This rebuilt and repopulated 'Celtic' village is chronologically contaminated only by the presence of fellow adventurers with their strange communication devices – ironically, the hilltop is the only place on the heritage site with a mobile signal. There are few other signs of the twenty-first century here, no interpretation panels or modern barriers, and nothing within view but hills and trees. To find out more, visitors must interact with the costumed guides, a deliberate policy to encourage engagement and to aid immersion into the Iron Age. A few visitors venture to engage the locals in dialogue (see examples below), many simply observe.

Wooden posts mark the footprints of those roundhouses that have not been reconstructed, the only reminder that this was once an

actual settlement, not simply dreamed up by Hugh Foster and, later, by the national park. The unique nature of this reimagined place, being constructed directly on top of the excavated remains of Iron Age buildings, is not, however, especially emphasised. Although the presence of the ancient monument was highlighted in previous proposals for Castell Henllys (RedKite 2013), which reflected the archaeological excavations and research that lie behind the reconstructions (Mytum and Meek 2020), this was not fully addressed on site at the time of our visit. This is perhaps a deliberate strategy to focus on a single (early) phase in the site through the living history. How many visitors realise that this was once the actual home of a real community in the distant past? Do they notice the extraordinary *Chevaux de Frise* defence across the approach, or spot the remains of drystone wall banks? Here, the archaeological narrative is largely absent. The 'Iron Age' inhabitants of the open-air museum are not there to discuss issues of chronology, stratification, features or artefacts. Rather, the open-air museum aims to facilitate a specific experience of immersion.

Mandy, who trained as an artist and puppeteer and who, after 14 years at Castell Henllys, now plays the role of the leader of the settlement, explained why she and her colleagues take this approach:

> Because it's not archaeology for us. It's our life! The point is to do complete role play – be an Iron Age person from the time we come up here … And I like to do it in as full on a way as possible. We are essentially Iron Age people.

She described how, rather than talking about the evidence from archaeology, they prefer to demonstrate, so that visitors learn by watching and chatting. As she cooked supper, for example, she would talk about the seasons and the way her diet depended on the availability of different foods throughout the year, either through farming, gathering or hunting.

In the very different context of Native Indian re-enactors, Petra Karlshoven (2012, 564) describes how they, 'Strive to become good or better at re-experiencing material worlds from the past through replication'. Because they do this as modern subjects, living in the modern world, this aim is inherently contradictory: 'They invest themselves bodily and imaginatively in the models they wish to recapture, while being, sometimes painfully, sometimes amusedly, aware of the ironies and compromises inherent in their mimetic practice' (Karlshoven 2012, 564). Karlshoven highlights how these re-enactors face and resolve a series of contradictions as they engage in forms of mimetic practice that hover

between different states and times: 'Precisely because Indianism differs from ordinary life and yet is predicated on attempts to enact an elusive everyday, such attitudes and choices are negotiated constantly, causing frictions and misunderstandings amongst practitioners' (Karlshoven 2012, 562). Re-enactors at Castell Henllys face a similar set of dilemmas in their paradoxical efforts to recreate an Iron Age 'everyday' in the twenty-first century, though here tensions are more often experienced in their interactions with visitors rather than with one another.

Mandy explained that, when asked 'Are you Celts?', she would respond: 'Who are the Celts? Oh, you mean us? That's your name for us? We are the Demetae people!' In earlier renditions of this open-air museum, educational emphasis was placed on the Celtic character of the Iron Age community living at Castell Henllys and their links to modern Welsh people – this concept was subjected to a detailed archaeological critique during the 1990s (see Gruffudd, Herbert and Piccini 1998, 163–6). Until recently, the national curriculum for schools in Wales strongly emphasised both the Celtic Iron Age and the Celtic origins of the Welsh. The current Welsh *History in the National Curriculum* contains a much-reduced focus on the idea of a Celtic past, now considered by some to be less inclusive for the modern nation (Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills 2008, 12). Despite this, we will see that the emphasis on ancestral Celtic origins at Castell Henllys has continued until the present day in some of the communications we witnessed, although the emphasis may now be on Welsh speakers rather than the nation of Wales as a whole. The Demetae, mentioned by Mandy, were one of the Iron Age peoples ('tribes') that inhabited Wales, and the concept does not have such problematic connotations in educational and academic terms (as is the case with the discussion of the Silures in Chapter 5).

Mandy went on to describe how many visitors failed to appreciate the insular nature of Iron Age knowledge, compared to that of modern society, in which the world is hyper-connected. She commented: 'They say "Do you know Boudica?" and I reply "Boudica? I've never heard of her …". It's mystifying for them, that we don't know – that we don't have the same knowledge or the means of sharing stuff that they do.' Dylan, another costumed guide, recounted a memorable conversation with one visitor for whom he had tried to highlight differences between her world and theirs: 'Your houses aren't round? Let's get this straight – they're square? Made out of bricks? With holes in the roof that make them catch fire and holes in the walls that let the wind go through?'

Another member of the team, Emma, is an Archaeology graduate and Palaeobiology postgraduate. Her Iron Age persona is called 'Aella'.

She described how her costume and her new name have helped her to become immersed in her role-playing: 'You sort of become your Iron Age counterpart when you dress up. It's an automatic thing. It's really weird 'cos you're "Christened" when you start. You're given your Iron Age name. You become that person.' Emma uses her 'Aella' character to help break the ice when chatting to visitors:

> I think people find it much easier to engage with you if you're someone else rather than this official wearing a badge … they joke with you, like 'Ha! You're wearing funny shoes' and like '*I* am wearing funny shoes – aren't *you* wearing funny shoes?!' You build up a banter with them.

Twenty-first century technology provides another source of discussion (Emma again):

> They'll hold up a phone to you and you say 'What is that?' And they say 'Oh, we're taking a piccy' and you reply, 'You're not taking anything from this site!' And they say 'No, no – we're going to paint you'. So, you say 'Well, it'll take a while … we better sit down' but they say 'No, no, it's instant' … and you can keep going and they seem to really enjoy it.

The guides present their own world from within it, although they have developed devices to allow them some licence. For example, in their interactions with visitors, they make it clear that they are aware that there is a future world from which people regularly visit, so have some knowledge of the twenty-first century and have learned something of the long story of their home.

The temporal lines sometimes get blurred. Talking partly from her character's present of the Iron Age and partly in the present of the twenty-first century, Emma/Aella explained:

> We're fully aware that people come and go from the future. We have a magical bridge you see … So we've been talking with people from this period for centuries. They've been coming back to our timeline. And that is how we get round it. We say that people in the future will be excavating the site.

The timeline is further stretched by the inclusion of Roman-themed activities. In addition to his role in the Iron Age community, Dylan is

the site's resident Roman legionary. He regularly drills young visitors, marching them around the hillfort, between the roundhouses and seemingly is on good terms with the local people.

Emma described how having the Roman army in the village can be polarising, both for the community and the visitors:

> It does really make people think, because they think the Romans came and they slaughtered everyone and they all disappeared. And then you explain – there's two parts to our tribe, those that are very welcoming of the Romans coming in and then those that are absolutely against them. And then you have to join different camps throughout the day.

Later she elaborates:

> You'll have some of the Celts very welcoming – 'Oh let's pour you a drink' – and then the others handing round the jug of wine and asking the visitors to spit inside it! So it's quite nice, you get to see these two sides of you know, the invaders coming in. Are you going to welcome them or are you going to stand up against them? It does make people think and there are subtleties around site, like the Romans are marching by and then you have the Celts looking proudly on as their children are joining in. And then you have the other side, where they're making faces at them. So yeah … people are understanding.

Even without the direct archaeological interpretations, this is a site whose physical qualities and landscape setting invoke strong connections with the past. From the moment visitors follow the sign from the main road until they enter the grand gateway to the hillfort and meet the community, the local topography and vegetation are choreographed, both naturally and by design, to create a memorable experience. The focus here, though, is primarily on people rather than place, as we shall discover in Chapter 7. This is a centre that continues to evolve and to respond to changing public expectations and new heritage trends, but at its core it remains a well-defended Iron Age hillfort set on a spur of land encircled by a river, affording extensive views across the countryside. The situation and physical features that once separated the settlement from the surrounding landscape now act to instantiate a separation between this Iron Age past and the modern world below.

In the next section we explore another site where a similar form of physical separation is associated with a distinctive experience of temporal disjunction.

The edge of the empire at Vindolanda

Vindolanda Roman Fort and Museum in Northumberland (run by the Vindolanda Charitable Trust, Northumberland) lies a mile south of the later development of Hadrian's Wall, on the earlier Stanegate – the Roman road that linked Corbridge (Coria) in the east with Carlisle (Luguvalium) in the west. The site occupies a whinstone spur above the junction of two small streams that combine to become the Chineley Burn. Several decades of excavations have uncovered the remains of a succession of nine forts that were occupied from the 80s CE to the early fifth century and beyond (Birley 2009). The remains are displayed to visitors, who can also explore the museum featuring artefacts from the excavations, including the world-famous Vindolanda 'letters'. Onsite reconstructions include sections of the curtain wall of Hadrian's Wall and a small temple (Figure 6.2).

As at Castell Henllys, visitors approach the site via narrow lanes, although the main access route follows the Stanegate Roman road from the west and is relatively straight, a first clue that we are now in 'Roman territory'. Keen eyes may spot the remains of a Roman milestone on the roadside. From the West Gate car park, the site is not

Figure 6.2 The reconstructions at Vindolanda. Photographed by Richard Hingley, 2024. Reproduced with permission of the Vindolanda Trust.

yet visible. Visitors enter via a small ticket office into a reconstructed Roman-style atrium, with water feature and statues – a transitional space between the modern, outside world and the Roman remains beyond. This transition is, however, interrupted, as to reach the site requires further passage through a contemporary building housing a scale model of the site with displays recounting the story of the forts that successively occupied the field beyond. Finally, equipped with background information, maps and guidebooks, visitors step into the Roman world of Vindolanda, following the original route of the ancient road through the extramural civil settlement (*vicus*) towards the west gate of the fort, past the foundations of a minor temple and numerous small buildings. The enormous extent of the remains quickly becomes apparent, and the surrounding landscape excludes many contemporary sights and sounds, helping visitors to engage with the place and its stories. Given the large extent of the site, the presence of a few fellow 'travellers' serves only to populate the *vicus* and reanimate the ancient streets and shops. The reconstructed sections of the stone and timber phases of Hadrian's Wall are popular with children, who, without prompting, engage in informal and unscripted re-enactments of their own, playing at patrolling the ramparts and engaging in mock battles.

Beyond the archaeological remains, the ground drops steeply into the deep valley created by the Chineley Burn, where the museums, shop and café are situated out of site and unobtrusively. Beyond the valley lie the heather- and bracken-covered slopes of Barcombe Hill (Figure 6.3), the site of a small Iron Age hillfort, later used as a Roman signal tower and a preferred source of the stone for third-century masons (Birley 2009, 13).

Although, as at Castell Henllys, external intrusions are minimised by the landscape, at Vindolanda interactions with visitors are staged in a very different way. This is an active archaeological site and each summer volunteers join the excavations that continue to uncover new remains. There is a strong directive to communicate and to share the findings of excavation and research with the public. Visitors can get close to the action, chat to the volunteer excavators and archaeologists and listen to the weekly 'trench talks' for updates on progress and the latest discoveries. Regular guided tours by uniformed volunteers (rather than 'characters' as at Castell Henllys) provide more detailed information. Although there are reconstructions, these are not the main attractions. Rather, the huge extent of the Roman remains, including the *vicus* buildings, two bathhouses, the auxiliary forts and the extensive and impressive (and regularly updated) museum displays are what draw tens of thousands of visitors each year. Yet, the outside space is large

Figure 6.3 View across the site at Vindolanda towards Barcombe Hill. Photographed by Kate Sharpe, 2017. Reproduced with permission of the Vindolanda Trust.

enough to allow personal reflections and exploration. Visitors might wander through the streets of the *vicus* walking on flagstones eroded by many sandalled feet, or call at the butcher's shop, complete with its counter and drainage system. Unlike Castell Henllys, this settlement is not usually populated by active characters and there are no fires burning in the hearths, but its isolated situation – physically apart from the modern communication networks – serves to create a similar atmosphere of separation in time. Here, there is space for visitors to use their own imagination to conjure the sights, sounds and smells of life in Vindolanda without the imposition of *dramatis personae* from someone else's vision of the past. In the absence of a dynamic cast as found at Castell Henllys, visitors are free to ponder as they wander the streets. This minimised interpretation can be imaginatively productive.

Roman re-enactors are sometimes used to draw the public and to explain aspects of Roman military organisation. The Vindolanda Trust arranges experimental activities on site from time to time – for example, pottery production and baking – but the guides are not in place to mimic the Roman occupants of the fort or *vicus*. This reflects the very different policy of interpretation here compared to that at Castell Henllys, where dramatisation is central. The more factual presentation style may also be linked to popular perceptions of the Romans as less mysterious and more

familiar than the Iron Age peoples. The site of Vindolanda is also more visible and more easily readable than the hillfort at Castle Henllys. Many visitors are more knowledgeable about the Roman period as a result of school education and TV programmes and familiar with the notion that we know the Romans through 'all they did for us', as popularised through the Monty Python film *Life of Brian* (1979) and in the BBC series *What the Romans Did For Us* (Chapter 1). The 'Romans' are often known for those things that make them 'just like us' – things like engineering, law, public health and literacy, that are often considered to be key elements of modern society.

The commonly held notion that Romans were concerned with ideas and technologies rather than emotions means that any magic or romance connected with the 'otherness' of this particular past is diminished. However, Martin, one of the trained volunteer guides, is keen to ensure that the people and the human stories of Vindolanda are represented in his talks. A retired scientist, he first encountered Vindolanda when he reluctantly accompanied his wife, a keen regular participant in the summer excavations. He then started a degree in Earth Sciences and a chance conversation on site with Andrew Birley (CEO and director of excavations) led to him undertaking a project looking at the sources of the stone used to build the various phases of Vindolanda. In 2013, he and his wife moved to the area, and he was invited to become a volunteer guide. He has gradually developed a story about what happened at Vindolanda:

> [T]he Vindolanda writing tablets just give us a whole new dimension … and I think that helps people to personalise it because the important thing that we are trying to teach people here is who was here, what they were doing, why they came and what life was like … even the wonderful finds we make are just props to be able to tell that human story.

Martin stressed the need to focus on the human aspects:

> Increasingly, archaeologists will say archaeology is a science because we use so much science in doing the work and I am a scientist by trade … but the important thing is understanding who the people were, where they came from, what they were doing, what they thought, what their economy was like – all of these human things. So, archaeology is a humanity even more than probably any other humanity.

He is particularly intrigued by comparisons between past and present:

> There is a strong sense in which the past is not just another country but almost another planet and yet in other ways we are the same species, the same people, the same physical and emotional needs and all of the rest of it. And that contrast between the strong differences and the strong similarities is the thing that I have learned most about. I am sure there were a lot of people at the time … who in those senses were much more like us. Who didn't think that going out and fighting and getting killed and being killed was a good idea and taking over other people's countries and all of the rest of it was a desirable thing to do at all – but *they* didn't write history.

Unlike the role-playing guides at Castell Henllys who are limited to their own moment in time, the staff at Vindolanda draw upon a much longer history in their presentations, from the pre-Roman Iron Age through the 450-year Roman occupation of the fort. Jacquie is in her first year as educational archaeologist at Vindolanda, and her role includes educational site talks, to both school children and adult groups. She also supervises the post-excavation work and helps out with the volunteer excavations. Jacquie always had an interest in the past, having grown up in the village of Uffington (Oxfordshire), famed for its White Horse, and began as a volunteer herself, while completing an undergraduate and then a master's degree in Archaeology. She explained that, although her dissertation looked at the relationship between Iron Age settlements and Hadrian's Wall, she is selective about the time span she includes in her talks, which are carefully tailored to her audience:

> I talk about the last phase of Vindolanda running through the third and fourth century. I never mentioned the layers when I do a 'kid talk' because it's just too confusing for them, as is me saying that there are nine forts here and they can only see one, so I don't mention the Iron Age because it's not the part of the Vindolanda that I am talking about, and I just feel like it would confuse them.

The adults do, however, get a fuller picture:

> I tell them about the stratigraphy on site and often I mention that there is a hillfort on Barcombe Hill and that's where the quarries are. You get a bit more of the connection between the

> Brigantes and obviously talking about the writing tablets, I bring in the 'horrible Britons', you know, the birthday letters and things like that and sort of mention bits about other people who are in the area.

Jaquie's reference to 'horrible Britons' relates to the pejorative Latin word *Brittunculi* ('wretched little Britons') used by a Roman official in a commentary on the Britons' military tactics, captured by one of the Vindolanda tablets.

The wider, contextualised overview offered at Vindolanda is unavailable within the model used at Castell Henllys, where the inhabitants of the hillfort have only their own personal histories within their roles on which to draw (although they might, conceivably, have access to imaginary oral histories!). Each approach provides visitors with a particular way to encounter the people of the past, with stories derived from the excavations much more prominent at Vindolanda than at Castell Henllys, but both sites offer the opportunity to experience the very spaces once inhabited by these communities. Evidently, the reconstructions of buildings are a more prominent feature of the display at Castell Henllys and something of a side feature at Vindolanda. But in both cases, experiences of these pasts are inflected by a direct connection via place, which mediates a sense of connection and relates to an understanding of authenticity.

Most open-air museums, however, are geographically unconnected to specific ancient places and remains. Although drawing on information from several excavated sites, often representing many periods, they are physically removed from their sources. Yet, these venues aim to create a comparable sense of 'time travel' and transition into the past, albeit a more multiperiod voyage of adventure. At the opposite end of England to Vindolanda, in the more populous county of Hampshire, one such outdoor heritage venue achieves similar levels of separation from the outside world, despite the proximity of potential intrusions.

Living in the past: reconstructed homes and recreated heritage

Butser Ancient Farm (run by Butser Education Community Interest Company), near Clanfield in Hampshire, is the latest reincarnation of a project that began as experimental research, an 'Iron Age Farm' initiated by the Council for British Archaeology in 1972 and led by Peter Reynolds

(Chapter 3). The farm has moved location on three occasions, and the roundhouses have been regularly reconstructed. In common with several other open-air museums that were originally constructed to display Iron Age roundhouses, the agenda has expanded to include reconstructions of buildings from additional phases of the past.

After a challenging period following the death of Reynolds, the current management team took over in 2007 and the site is now run as Butser Education Community Interest Company, a not-for-profit company. The current site, Bascomb Copse, lies just 500 metres from the busy A3 dual carriageway linking London with the south coast, yet there is very little intrusion from the traffic. It includes a visitor centre, several 'technology pods' and reconstructions representing the Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Saxon periods, with associated field systems, crops and animals (Creighton 2020). This expansion of the chronological coverage of prehistory was, in part, a direct response to the changes in the English national school curriculum, which first included prehistory in 2013 (Department for Education 2014, 247, 251; English Heritage 2010, 19).

Due to remarkable foresight, the Neolithic longhouse was already underway before this change, but required rapid completion to accommodate the first wave of primary schools. The site was initially opened to teachers during the school holidays, allowing them to brush up their knowledge of prehistory with an intensive two-hour course, and around 150 attended. The change to the curriculum resulted in an increase from 14,000 to around 35,000 children visiting per year at the time of our visit in 2018. A Mesolithic house soon followed, and a collaboration with Wessex Archaeology saw the construction of a new Neolithic house between 2019 and 2021. A Bronze Age roundhouse is the most recent addition, built by volunteers from Operation Nightingale in 2021. Operation Nightingale is a military initiative developed to use archaeology as a means of aiding the recovery of service personnel injured in recent conflict, particularly in Afghanistan. The Iron Age enclosure contains six roundhouses based on excavations at Moel y Gerddi (near Harlech, Gwynedd), Little Woodbury (near Salisbury, Wiltshire), Glastonbury (Somerset) and Danebury (near Andover, Hampshire). The Roman villa is based on excavations near Sparsholt (Winchester).

Archaeological experimentation continues, while maintenance is ongoing and is a continual source of new insights, as is the growing of ancient crops and animal rearing. The animals have become a key attraction for younger families, with spring lambs and goat kids drawing visitors who would perhaps not normally choose to come to a 'heritage' site.

Providing access to farm animals is an approach that has long been adopted by open-air museums in Britain and elsewhere in Europe to encourage visits from families and from schools (Paardekooper 2013, 65–6).

Like many of the venues referenced here, the site is approached by a narrow lane that gives a sense of spatial segregation. It is shielded by rising ground to the west and by woodland. Views eastwards are more open, but only the occasional electricity pylon slightly spoils the illusion. Here, as elsewhere, the car park is carefully hidden, in this case behind the visitor centre. Passing through this building, visitors enter a past world that encompasses snapshots of life from the Mesolithic through to the Saxon period, with reconstructed houses, crops and livestock appropriate to each period. The centrepiece (and the original concept) is an enclosed Iron Age settlement, itself surrounded by ditches, banks and hedges – one ancient domain set within the wider bubble of the more general past world of Butser. Beyond this enclosure, the reconstructed Roman villa, briefly introduced in Chapter 3, stands in stark stone contrast to the wooden, daubed and thatched Iron Age constructions and to the Saxon house ahead – a world apart from what went both before and after (Figure 6.4). Spatial segregations mark the divisions between chronologically discrete archaeological periods, although the route is open and many head directly towards the animals, disrupting any idea of chronological succession.

In contrast to the previous venues, where interpretation mostly foregrounds a temporal break between past and present, Butser has the potential to offer a more linear, periodised temporality with buildings arranged in a loosely chronological plan. Rebecca is the recently appointed creative developer. She studied Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge University and worked with the National Trust, developing an interest in promoting public engagement with heritage, although this was in relation to a stately home and somewhat different to the challenges presented by Butser. A native of Hampshire, she is happy to be back on home turf, dealing with a more familiar period and having the freedom to be more creative due the absence of written archives and living relatives!

When we visited, Rebecca was starting to assess the site and planning ways to enhance the visitor experience. She was keen to develop the concept of a chronological journey through the site, showing how things developed over time:

> The great thing about Butser is that we are not just one period … you can direct people and make more of that – you know that you

are walking through history. As you go further on your journey, you are going further through time as well.

At the time of my (Kate Sharpe's) visit there were no regular tours or presentations for casual visitors. Staff were predominantly in uniform and found busy at their work, building and repairing the structures, tending to the farm animals, or offering hands-on opportunities to milk the goat, grind corn or bake bread. During term time, visits from the broader public are often necessarily somewhat marginalised by the school activities. Visiting groups of children often (temporarily) occupy several of the reconstructed houses or gain hands-on experience of the wide range of ancient skills and crafts. A significant amount of time is spent with the growing numbers of school visits, catered for by an education team. Costumed volunteers also contribute at weekends, available to demonstrate spinning or felt-making, or to talk about the structures. Though engaged in demonstrating practices and techniques from the past, both staff and volunteers retain their own personalities, and their characters continue to occupy the temporality of the present. They provide a connection between past and present, providing visitors with both intimate insights and a historical perspective, helping them to visualise and empathise.

Maria, who has a postgraduate degree in Material Anthropology and Museum Studies, has two roles. She is an education facilitator teaching school children once a week in her Butser uniform and she also contributes as a costumed volunteer. But even when in costume, Maria prefers not to adopt a character:

Figure 6.4 Iron Age enclosure with Roman villa behind at Butser Ancient Farm. Photographed by Kate Sharpe, 2018. Reproduced with permission of Butser Ancient Farm.

> To be honest it's really, really hard to stay in first person. And I wonder, sometimes what it actually gives visitors, because when you can flip between topics and talk about stuff it gives you a lot more freedom to explore the past and explore the world – explore how things were happening – if you're just you rather than an actor.

Unlike at Castell Henllys, interpretation panels are present, but they are unobtrusive and do not play a significant role in structuring the visitor's understanding and experience of the site. Archaeological information is conveyed via large panels with thematic overviews and more detailed laminated pages are available in each structure, but the focus is on presenting a realistic, working interior rather than a museum diorama.

The hearths are kept burning in the larger houses. This helps to kill insects in the thatch and so prevent birds pulling at the straw in search of food; but it is also intended to create a more 'authentic' atmosphere for visitors, according to the guides interviewed on site. Mark, Butser's maintenance supervisor and resident Roman legionary, observed: 'It's one thing seeing a picture of it [a roundhouse] in a book and it's another thing walking in there with a fire going and you've got the smoke overhead – the "smoke ceiling" we had the other day.'

Maria agreed that this type of bodily encounter is a key component of a visit to the site:

> The whole ethos at Butser is trying to get them to think about an experience – what it would feel like. And they are learning things here that they cannot learn in the classroom … we'll more often talk about 'What did it feel like? Put your hands on the wall – what do they feel like? What do you think they are made of? When you breathe in, is it clean air? Is it smoky air?'
>
> And the activities are all centred around things that they've probably not done but they relate to ancient technology. So, they might do chalk carvings, jewellery-making, cordage, spinning. We try and keep it quite physical.

On exiting the Iron Age enclosure, visitors are immediately confronted by the Roman villa. Their chronological journey so far might suggest that they have now moved into the distant future and entered a new era of square, stone buildings occupied by a very different society but, perhaps unintentionally, this also reflects the fact that roundhouses continued to be constructed into the Roman period (Smith et al. 2016, 47–51). Variable forms of settlement clearly co-existed throughout rural Britain,

although perhaps not usually as closely as at Butser. In her assessment of the site for potential future enhancements, Rebecca has spotted the potential of sites that span the Iron Age–Roman divide:

> The fact that we've got the Iron Age enclosure and the villa right next to each other – you can have really interesting conversations about: 'Do you think these [Iron Age houses] all disappeared and everyone was living in that [Roman villa]? Actually, these coexisted …'
>
> It's an ideal site for showing there isn't just this really clear division. I think within that [chronological route] we can also try and get across the fact that if some new technology came in, it doesn't mean that they stopped using the old technologies.

Maintenance supervisor and legionary Mark (whose father is the centurion of the Butser IX Legion) has featured in several films and documentaries in the guise of his Roman and Iron Age alter egos. He is looking forward to increased interactions between the Iron Age village and the Roman world beyond. He hopes to see a soldier standing above the new gateway, demanding tolls from visitors trying to enter, and showing that the settlement is under Roman rule! There is also a suggestion to build a section of Roman road connecting to the Iron Age trackway from the enclosure. Mark observed:

> The Romans also had a buffer zone, so you have got the edge of Rome and you've got a territory that is neutral and then the enemy – and that messiness is never really portrayed. [At Butser] we have them sitting side by side so people can compare.

But he also pointed to the fact that, for much of the time, the buildings are unoccupied:

> You need physical people, [for visitors] to go 'Look at this person, look at that person, look at their houses, look at how different they are! – But they are both the same, they both mingle, they both meet, they both work together'. [But the] Roman house it looks like it's the end of the Empire. The Romans have gone home, left the house and it's the end. Especially when it's cold as well, it just feels like the end! So, the only way to do that is to cook in there, to be in there, to make it come alive and I mean, when we've got enough people in the legion, we can occupy every single room.

The villa is equipped with its own open-air (reconstructed) lavatories. Mark joked that a costumed re-enactor could make this feature more engaging:

> That would be funny, if you go around the corner and there is a guy sitting there, with a writing tablet, like he is reading the papers sort of thing – 'Morning!' and it's that sort of thing that makes it come alive. I mean otherwise it is just an empty toilet which … you can sit on, you can have fun but …

Rebecca cited an initiative underway at Butser, where visitors are actively contributing to an experiment by walking over a reconstructed mosaic floor in the Roman villa. By stepping into the shoes of the Roman occupants they become part of the reconstruction and help to test the durability of the floor. They have determined that the cement used is already breaking up very quickly.

Butser Ancient Farm and similar open-air museums offer the opportunity to step into reimagined spaces designed partially as backdrops for educational experiences of hands-on engagement in activities and crafts. Indeed, Butser has also been used as a film set. Recent anthropological accounts challenge concepts of imagination as abstract, immaterial and purely 'cognitive', questioning the mind-world dualisms on which these ideas routinely rest (e.g. Barber 2007; Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen 2009; Yarrow 2019). Extending these perspectives, we see how the past is made present through specific 'technologies of the imagination' (Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen 2009). Chronological pathways, transitional spaces, boundaries and clever use of paths and vegetation are all used to manipulate imagination, to help the public engage and have a richer experience of the reconstructed past. Physical divisions and clearly marked trails are particularly important at multiperiod sites that may otherwise become generic 'past' worlds with merged or unclear chronologies. Yet, as we have seen in the case of the legionaries marching through the Butser roundhouses, these sites representing millennia of history create opportunities for the deconstruction of purely linear, progressive pasts punctuated by artificial cultural boundaries.

At Butser and at Castell Henllys the occasional mingling of costumed guides creates surprising and interesting temporal anachronisms. At times these stretch the interpretations that archaeologists derive from the materials they assemble, but they can also be interpretively productive. Anachronistic juxtapositions and temporal dissonance

may call for some of the visitors to engage in imaginative work. What is the relationship between the past and the present? Did Iron Age and Roman pasts intersect and, if so, how?

We have so far considered the ways in which largely rural heritage sites are able, by both chance and design, to transport visitors into past worlds. But what happens when the excavation site or the remains are less isolated?

Urban encounters: the past in the middle of the present

In contrast to the venues explored above, many Roman urban remains are often situated within the settlements that subsequently grew up around and on top of them. Yet even in these surroundings, many achieve a sense of separation, albeit on a smaller scale – time paused while the present rushes on. The World Heritage Site of the Roman Baths in Bath, for example, lies in the heart of the city. Today, the well-preserved bathing and temple complex are entirely hidden from public view, accessed only via the museum which occupies the Victorian Pump Room. Despite (or because of?) the concealed nature of this heritage venue, the baths attracted over 850,000 visitors in 2022, making it the twenty-eighth most visited attraction in the UK (ALVA 2023).

Many other British towns and cities have similar, if less extensive, Roman remains scattered between and below their streets, shops, offices and homes (Chapter 2). The city of London, once Roman Londinium, has some of the most well-known urban Roman remains, constantly brought to light by new building developments and infrastructure enhancements such as Crossrail, which often involve deep excavation (Hingley 2018). Finding ways to study, preserve and present these sites is a continuing challenge for archaeologists, conservationists and heritage organisations, who have devised several innovative solutions. The London Mithraeum at Walbrook illustrates some of the issues (Bloomberg SPACE 2018). Here, we explore how the display of this mysterious temple has evolved from its initial 'out of time and space' reconstruction to its present incarnation, *in situ* and beneath the ground, removed from the 'present day', far below the street level of the twenty-first century.

Built in the early third century CE, the Mithraeum stood in a wide marshy area (now known as the Walbrook Valley), among other temples, houses and industrial premises (Hingley 2018, 183–6). Its discovery, in the 1950s, during archaeological investigation of a World War II

bomb site, captured the public imagination, and an estimated 400,000 people queued to visit the excavated remains. A report from Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) who undertook recent excavations at the Bloomberg site notes: 'At a time when London was still recovering from the war and rationing had only just ended, the temple seemed to capture a sense of hope and pride in London's endurance and continuity' (MOLA 2017). After much discussion, site owners, Legenland, offered to dismantle the temple and re-erect it elsewhere at their own expense. In 1962, the reconstruction was unveiled – on a car park nearly 100 metres from its original location, at modern street level, in the wrong orientation, with many architectural features misrepresented and using twentieth-century building materials. The cellared floor was rebuilt as crazy paving.

In 2010, Bloomberg acquired the site of the 1950s excavation for redevelopment as their European headquarters. The local authority, the City of London, provided an initial brief. The temple should be reconstructed as close as possible to the original location, should reflect the original form and incorporate as much of the original fabric as possible, using sympathetic new materials where appropriate. The compromised nature of the surviving structure was viewed as an opportunity to be creative – more so than would be possible with *in situ* remains.

In 2017, detailed archaeological records, contemporary photography and newsreels were used to make an exact replica of the remains as first exposed – at the right depth and orientation, but a little to the west. Roman materials were supplemented by custom-made Roman-style tiles and bricks. The floor was created using a painted resin cast of an earth floor made by MOLA archaeologists with Roman dirt and debris from the city.

This new Mithraeum is accessed at no charge, but by prior appointment, via Bloomberg SPACE, a cultural hub that showcases the ancient temple, a selection of artefacts found during the recent excavations and a series of contemporary art commissions responding to the site. Visitors arrive by appointment at a gallery on the ground floor (street level) of the Bloomberg European Headquarters building (Bloomberg SPACE 2018). The remains of the temple are accessed by descending a staircase into an underground gallery. Centuries of living and dumping rubbish have led to an accumulation of material that means that the earliest Roman deposits are now 9 metres below modern street level in this part of London. This fits well with the 'mystery' cult of Mithras, the god to whom the temple was dedicated, allowing the heritage designers to draw on the mythological narrative of the cave in

which Mithras slaughtered a bull, whose blood, it was believed, fertilised all the world's vegetation.

The requirement to physically move down to the lower gallery is also used by the designers to play on the concept of 'descending through time' (Bloomberg SPACE 2018, 11). As the visitor moves down the staircase, they are told (Bloomberg SPACE 2018, 13):

> Archaeological and historical records for this site have allowed us [Bloomberg] to show the different levels of London's history as you descend … to the Mezzanine level, where you arrive at the very last days of the Romans in Britain, about AD 410.

A display of this descent through time is provided in the form of a diagram of the site stratigraphy, labelled to indicate different periods from the bombing of the site in 1941 to the end of Roman Britain. Descending even further, visitors reach the lowest part of the site – ground level in the middle of the third century CE (Bloomberg SPACE 2018, 15) – where the reconstructed remains of the temple are displayed. These reflect the earliest phases of the temple and emphasise the mysteries of being in the Roman temple of Mithras. Promotional material claims that: 'Haze, light and the sound of footsteps, chanting and secret whispers will transport you back to London AD 240'.

The London Mithraeum has undergone a significant transformation. On its initial discovery, the archaeological site, set within a bombsite, became a symbolic place representing survival through adversity. Once relocated and recreated in a haphazard fashion, it lost its context and became an anonymous element of the concrete urban landscape. Today, it is hidden beneath a building, but creatively recreated and encapsulated within its own time.

Intersections of time and space

Accounts of heritage have tended to adopt one of two broad orientations to modern time. Archaeologically informed accounts are often structured by interpretive assumptions about the 'reality' of the past. By contrast, critical heritage studies scholars have adopted a more presentist approach, which nonetheless engenders its own temporal assumptions (Jones and Yarrow 2022). From this perspective the 'reality' of the present is understood to explain a socially constructed past. By adopting a more temporally agnostic approach in this chapter, we have

aimed to understand how modern time is enacted through the situated encounters and specific material conditions of particular heritage sites.

Inspired by Foucault's conceptualisation of heterotopias and by recent anthropological accounts of modern time, we have sought to highlight the specific ways in which certain Iron Age and Roman heritage sites draw interpretive force as places that are situated outside of and beyond the contemporary world. We have shown how this involves specific configurations of time and space. At these heritage sites, the past is made imaginatively present through specific material and spatial configurations that are choreographed in a range of ways. Our ethnography demonstrates how it is possible to enter ancient spaces and leave the modern world behind, how the transition from present to past can be enacted by the depth at which the remains are displayed (London Mithraeum), distance travelled (Castell Henllys, Vindolanda), landscape, thresholds (Castell Henllys) and choreographed experiences (Castell Henllys).[1] While broadly premised on modern concepts of linear time, different sites internalise and situate these abstractions in specific ways. In some cases, a strong spatial separation is used to enact a strong temporal contrast between present and past, while at others the demarcations are less clear, as at Castell Henllys with the first-person narratives. All involve an experience of temporal dissonance, which is imaginatively created and overcome in various ways (these themes are developed in Chapter 7).

While some venues project past remains into the contemporary space-time of 'display', others invite visitors to 'travel' back to the present of the past. Though these spaces often enact chronological sequences, these are elicited and ordered in different ways. Heritage critiques have often highlighted the problems of a past, framed within the contours of the present and robbed of its inherent strangeness (e.g. Lowenthal 1985; Wright 2009 [1985]). Moving beyond this broad critique, we have attempted to foreground a more 'molecular' (Samuel 1994) understanding of the way in which the strange and familiar are juxtaposed and resolved through site-specific dialectics. While these are highly choreographed, they nonetheless enable surprising and unanticipated reflexive opportunities.

Some venues juxtapose several chronological phases that are themselves incompatible in a single location, as in the case of the reconstructions of Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Saxon buildings at Butser, or the multiple periods represented at the Ancient Technology Centre (Ancient Technology Centre 2017; Keen 1999). The reorientation of open-air museums over the past decades has

been designed to serve increasing demands from schools to help them to present the past to school children. The current business model may, however, be at odds with the original motivations behind the founding and management of these places, when archaeologists decided to reconstruct ancient buildings to provide new interpretations of neglected pasts (Chapter 3). These sites now present a complex and dynamic palimpsest of their own histories, renegotiated, reimagined and reconstructed in tune with changing concerns both from within and without.

Foucault (1984, 3–4) wrote:

> There are also, probably, in every culture, in every civilisation, real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and invented. Places of this kind are outside all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.

These 'heterotopias' are seen to act, through reference to the concept of utopia, as a mirror in which: 'I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface'. Our account has sought to highlight how reconstruction and performance make this virtual space real, at least for a while, to school children and other visitors to open-air museums.

In Chapter 7 we move on from the physical negotiation of spaces and places, to consider how the public engage with the past once they have arrived there. What devices do heritage venues employ to enrich the experiences of their visitors and help them to connect to the past. What messages do they aim to convey? And what impressions do visitors take away with them?

Note

1 See also the discussion of the Scottish Crannog Centre in Chapter 7, where the threshold of the site and choreographed experience is also used to enact this transition from present to past.

7

Experiencing the past: empathy and engagement

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>
> (English Heritage 2020)

Introduction: reconceptualising experience

'If people have fun, they are more likely to remember it and all those years ago I remember jumping out as a child with paint all over my face. It was the most exciting thing I'd ever done. You wouldn't be able to do that at home.' During an interview, Emma, a young member of the cast at Castell Henllys, recollects her own visit to the site as a school child, when she took part in a staged 'ambush'. She explains how this experience informs the approach she now takes in her performances as a re-enactor at the Iron Age site:

> I think as long as it's exciting and fun – that's the biggest thing. I want it to be as factual as possible. It's hard to deliver something if you don't believe in it yourself. So, we try to do as much background research as possible to give people the most truthful experience we can.

Like others at Castell Henllys, Emma describes a commitment to the truth of an 'experience' of the past. While this is not incompatible with

archaeological accuracy, her focus on emotional, sensory and dramatic 'believability' makes this past present in ways that are distinct from its more purely factual significance.

Emma's reflections are personally specific but relate to broader ideological and discursive shifts that have led to an increasing emphasis on the creation of 'experience', in the way the past is made available as 'heritage'. This chapter explores how these broader ideas are woven into the reimagining and presentation of Iron Age and Roman pasts. Through ethnographic accounts of outdoor heritage sites, we ask what is at stake in this shift to thinking of encounters with the past as being about 'experience' rather than more straightforwardly about knowledge or information? What relationships are being imagined between the past and the present, and how are these practically and materially enacted? How does this change in emphasis affect how the past is presented and encountered? Through exploring these questions, our account foregrounds the range of ways in which the past is made present, both materially and imaginatively.

While anthropological accounts have often involved analytical commitment to the lived experiences of particular groups of people, they have rarely focused on experience as an ethnographically significant category and concept. Anthropologists have often challenged ideas of the universality of human experience, through accounts that highlight its historical and cultural constructedness (see Desjarlais 1994). Important as these have been in questioning universal and essentialist framings, such approaches pay little attention to the social and historical formation of the category of 'experience'. Aiming to trace the meanings and practices animated by this term, we take inspiration from Heywood's discussion of 'ordinary life', as a similarly nebulous concept that is often analytically invoked but rarely ethnographically examined (2024). In his ethnography of the Italian town of Predappio, he explores how the pursuit of 'ordinary life' itself becomes an active object of focus and concern in the face of the manifest extraordinariness of living in the birthplace of Mussolini, a place that remains the focus of continued Fascist interest (Heywood 2024, 29):

> Human life is, of course, messy, complex, contingent, and routine in any number of ways, and it would be a strange sort of ethnographer who thought otherwise. But sometimes it becomes particularly important to people – Predappiesi, politicians, philosophers, or anthropologists – that it be seen to be so. We will fail to understand such occasions, we suggest, if we do not take into account the ordinary life of concepts like 'ordinary life' themselves.

Inspired by this account we seek, analogously, to foreground the ideas, practices and material contexts through which the past is made to materialise as an 'experience' that requires active work, and which is situated, understood and enacted in a range of specific ways.

Experience in context

Before proceeding to our ethnographic analysis, we outline the broader discursive shifts that inform and situate the specific cases we discuss. These changes are driven by diverse ideological influences and are often associated with contradictory interests. Early concerns with experiential understandings of the past derived largely from their perceived experimental value as a route to better understanding. We have seen in Chapter 3 that experimental archaeology was used to fill in the gaps in knowledge about how to reconstruct roundhouses and in experiments on ancient crops and animals. Often, these ideas became linked to a pedagogical focus on 'hands-on' practical experience and problem-based learning. In partial contradiction to this approach was the focus on the development of experiential authority through living in the context of the physically reconstructed past, as emphasised by the Land of Legends open-air museum (Denmark) and the TV series *Living in the Past* (see Holtorf 2014, 791; Jin, Xiao and Shen 2020; Penrose 2020, 1248–9). Over the past three decades or so, an increasing heritage focus on 'experience', stemming from the experimental approaches to archaeology and living history movements, has also been driven by the internalisation of authorised heritage discourse-related critiques in mainstream practices and the neoliberal emphasis on heritage (more generally) as a financial 'asset'. In this context, the concept of 'experiencing' the past takes on specific valences as something that is objectified, commodified and reified. These narratives, though specific to the heritage sector, resonate with broader public discourses including, for instance, commodified narratives of the 'student experience' and the reconceptualisation of tourist sites as 'visitor experiences'. The practical implications for the presentation and representation of heritage are widespread and significant.

Responding to a growing demand for participatory 'experiences', many heritage-based visitor attractions have moved beyond simply providing informative tour guides, accessible interpretation panels, or interesting artefacts and reconstructions. Museums and outdoor venues increasingly seek new ways to engage the public and to create a more enticing 'offer'. Many sites now encourage visitors to experience the past

by 'doing' and 'being' and by becoming part of an ancient community (Holtorf 2014; West and Bowman 2010). The visitors, in effect, create their own heritage through direct involvement.

Heritage professionals deploy a range of techniques and devices to encourage hands-on interactions, aiming to recreate an 'authentic' taste of a different way of life. Our research indicates that, in some places, displays have also evolved away from factual, process and technology-related text towards people-centred messages. Archaeological plans and illustrations of settlements and tools are replaced by images of the communities who occupied and used them. As such, the recent inclusion of the section drawing in the staircase at Bloomberg SPACE (Chapter 6) is almost an anachronism. Evocative questions are posed at heritage attractions to generate empathy and to bring the past into focus on a personal level as contemporary references help visitors to relate to ancient communities. These may highlight differences, but also serve as reminders of the many, often personal, concerns that are common to past and present societies. Artefacts still play a role in communicating the past, but these are now presented in more human terms – in a functional or aesthetic context, emphasising identity. Personal use and ownership are prioritised over materiality, technology or chronological sequence and replicas allow visitors to handle and experience textures and shapes.

Reconstructions and living history demonstrations take this a stage further, giving visitors opportunities to make and use objects – to grind grain using a quern, to weave cloth on a loom, to turn wood on a pole lathe and to bake bread or milk a goat. By moving around the reimagined spaces of roundhouses, crannogs and villas, visitors are encouraged to absorb the sounds, smells and sometimes the tastes of these places, through physical and material encounters that are understood to generate psychological empathy (see Klompmaker 2016). Emotion is a key issue here.

The European Union-funded heritage project, Emotive, aims to use emotional storytelling to dramatically change visitor experiences at heritage sites, which are often highly charged places. They comment: 'We believe that drama-based narratives containing careful reference to a site's cultural content have the power to transform heritage and museum visitor experiences, encouraging repeat visits, facilitating direct and ongoing interaction and deepening knowledge transfer' (EMOTIVE n.d.).

The English Heritage strapline 'Step into England's story' echoes the focus of the National Curriculum (Department for Education 2014) with a vision statement that includes the following:

> People are increasingly looking for experiences that bring history to life in an engaging way and nothing beats standing on the spot where history happened. We offer a hands-on experience that will inspire and entertain people of all ages. Our work is informed by enduring values of authenticity, quality, imagination, responsibility and fun. (English Heritage 2020)

What might be intended, however, by the phrase 'England's story'? Whose story is this? Concepts of authenticity also require examination. What is 'authentic' and who decides on the values that determine it? Here, we consider the ways in which some of the Iron Age and Roman outdoor heritage venues visited during our research address these issues.

The changes in the perceived meaning and value of historic experience have had specific implications for the making and imagination of Iron Age and Roman heritages. Presenting the historical past, with its cast of colourful personalities and dramatic plot lines, has its own challenges but for earlier eras, and particularly for prehistory, the creation of characters and contexts is more difficult. The evidence is sparser and gaps in knowledge wider, chronologies are more relative and less resolved, events are vague and largely anonymous, and the lifeways and landscapes of prehistoric people are both less accessible to experts and less familiar to the public. Sometimes this leads to hugely caricatured stereotypes – 'barbarian warriors', 'eco-farmers' or 'deeply spiritual people' for the Iron Age, for example. Yet, the absence of a specific script or cast also provides much greater scope for more general, creative approaches.

Open-air heritage venues relating to the Iron Age have seized the opportunity to offer immersive engagements with heritage, particularly in relation to school visits, during which they can provide a range of physical and sensory experiences not possible in the classroom. These sites provide ideal stages for storytelling, with reimagined spaces, costumed actors, replica 'props' and opportunities for physical participation – all serving to break barriers between audience and actors. There is now an experimental and transformative approach to performing the Iron Age which embraces the concept of intangible heritage and which actors at open-air museums have developed at particular places and through discussions with their counterparts at other venues and the use of online advice and guidance (IMTAL 2024). Rules and standards have been developed, even if there is always room for experimentation.

Since there is relatively little direct evidence for the clothes worn by Iron Age peoples, creativity is required to dress guides. By contrast,

Roman military dress is much better documented, as we have seen in Chapter 4, although we have less knowledge of the clothes worn by non-military provincials (Carroll 2012). The degree to which Iron Age props are based on excavated finds varies from site to site. Although organic artefacts rarely survive, archaeological research has produced detailed information for the props used in crafting and cooking (Hurcombe 2015) and these activities provide popular immersive activities. Yet such performances of Iron Age life, by necessity, overlook significant – and often unexplored – differences between past and present.

Recreated spaces with unfamiliar textures, sounds, smells (and smoke!) are designed to give visitors the sense they have been transported through time – they have the potential to leave a deep impression. In the following section we examine how venues across Britain use storytelling, hands-on activities and people-centred exhibitions to evoke empathy and to make the past relevant in the present. How have these developments changed how people imagine and relate to these pasts?

'Both stranger and more familiar' at Castell Henllys

The aim to bring to life the people of the past is highly evident at Castell Henllys Iron Age Fort in south Wales. We have already seen how the situation of the site serves to separate the reconstructed settlement and its Iron Age inhabitants from the outside world and how the choreography of the visitors allows them to experience 'time travel' as they pass across the 'magical' bridge. In addition, from the moment they enter the site, visitors are invited to place themselves within the ancient community and both imagine and experience first-hand what it means to become Iron Age. The welcome sign warns that this will be 'both stranger and more familiar than you're probably expecting'.

In the entrance to the visitor centre, woollen shawls and tunics are placed beside a life-sized photograph of an extended Iron Age family – a photo opportunity designed to make visitors become part of the 'tribe'. The cafe is a popular venue and some go no further, but even casual visitors using the facilities encounter a message inside each cubicle door: 'How to make poo-it-yourself fertiliser' and 'Fancy swapping your toilet for a bucket?' with details about the use of human waste in the Iron Age. This message seems to fuse an idea of time travel with a message about environmentalism and sustainability. The past is offered as a lesson to the present audience, which it explicitly addresses through a practical and moral message. The point is not straightforwardly to inhabit the

past or escape the present. Rather, the explicit juxtaposition of past and present enables a kind of reflexivity – visitors are encouraged to reflect on their own lives and, more generally, on the values of the contemporary world in light of these evocations of an Iron Age past.

Moving on, visitors pass through a compact exhibition that offers a video presentation, interpretive panels and interactive screens and games. A single panel refers to the excavation of the site, although not to the archaeological finds, and no artefacts are displayed. Rather, Iron Age people remain in the foreground with large individual portraits of the family members we met at the entrance. In place of the traditional documentary-style, fact-based overview, the video presents a mini-drama – a snapshot of family life in the settlement. Large displays directly invite visitors to imagine aspects of Iron Age daily life, placing themselves within the tribe: 'Everyone in the village ate together when there was a feast. Imagine cooking for eighty people!'; 'What's your most precious possession? Would you give it to the gods?'; and 'Imagine if your whole family lived in one room. In a roundhouse everyone saw, heard and smelt everything you did'. Although these concepts are presented in the third person and clearly draw upon archaeological knowledge (for the use of domestic space and the ritual deposition of objects in votive contexts), this underlying information is not presented. Here, the 'strange' past is intended to provoke a reperception of otherwise familiar modern domestic arrangements.

Leaving the exhibition to cross the 'Bridge of Time', visitors follow the trail towards the settlement. At intervals along the path, inscribed boulders convey 'fun facts' about life in the Iron Age, emphasising differences between 'then' and 'now' and provoking lively discussion among some families: '1 in 5 children probably died before they were 5'; 'most people got up before dawn and went to bed at sunset'; 'children started working as soon as they could walk'; 'there was no tea, coffee, or chocolate'; 'most people never travelled far from their village'; 'there were no clocks'; 'women gave birth without modern painkillers'; 'most people only had one or two outfits to wear'. The list seems to overall convey a message of 'progress' – from a difficult past to a more comfortable, more 'civilised' present. The underlying rhetorical message is implicitly that people, particularly children, should appreciate the material benefits they have and the historical exceptionalism of this privilege.

The exhibition and the boulders each work in two ways – the spatial layout and representational technologies are intended to enable imaginative immersion in the Iron Age past while bringing the past firmly into the present by referencing contemporary concerns and values.

The intention is for visitors to begin to re-evaluate their assumptions, both about their own lives and priorities and about the lives of Iron Age communities. Moral and pedagogical possibility is enabled by the sense of contradiction. Rhetorical questions invite the visitor to draw their own conclusions.

Once within the settlement, the visitors gather in the centre. On cue, a tall, red-haired woman in a woollen tunic emerges from the largest roundhouse, welcoming all and introducing herself as the 'chief' of this village. Younger visitors listen intently as she talks about disputes with neighbouring tribes. Now, the spoken narrative is in the first person. Living history such as this can be performed in either the first or third person. Where a first-person approach is taken, as at Castell Henllys, this is felt to facilitate a fuller more 'immersive' engagement between visitors and particular heritage assets. Third-person performances fit more closely with the idea of archaeological distancing – the performers make it clear that a vast span of time separates modern people from the lives of the ancient populations they describe (Kidd 2011, 22). During her presentation, the 'chief' explicitly reflects on this approach, pointing to an audience member:

> I don't want to kill this young lady. But I want her to think that I will. If I approach her with a nice shiny sword she will probably run away. If I have a giant carrot … it wouldn't do the same job … We're nice people most of the time but you've got to be fierce!

An early criticism of Iron Age open-air museums was that they sidelined evidence of violence in the ancient past (Mytum 2003, 97). At Castell Henllys, however, the possibility of armed aggression is introduced, albeit in a gentle ironically jovial manner. The 'chief' describes iron swords, spearheads and shield bosses, and then asks the group what they think she and her warriors wear in battle. Guesses include chainmail, leather, wooden and metal armour and even 'rock'. Finally, she reveals all: 'We take off all our clothes' she exclaims to roars of laughter, adding 'It's a sign of bravery'. 'Have you heard of the Romans?' she then asks, explaining:

> They are such cissies. I reckon their mums still dress them … armour all down their arms and a hat and a hankie – and a great big shield that you can hide behind. We're not like that! We're brave! We take off all our clothes. But we don't look naked. We paint our bodies. We paint our arms, we paint our faces, we even paint our bottoms!

Although included in the drama to raise smiles, the idea that Iron Age warriors fought naked is a widespread trope in classical writings (Speidel 2004, 374) and the audience here assumes the information to be factual, conveyed directly – and with authority – from an Iron Age chieftain.

At this point, the chief is interrupted by a dishevelled woman who offers a new batch of body paint, eager to explain how it is made. She pours a little yellow liquid from a jug. 'You know what that is, don't you?' she asks, shrieking, 'It's human wee!' The children gasp in horror and delight. 'It's only three weeks old though' she adds. 'I spilled some on the way here … But I've got some more!' Her narrative dwells on bodily substances, using the compulsion of revulsion to engage a young audience. The narrative style is similar to and influenced by the *Horrible Histories* series of children's history books and TV shows, which leverages the shock and interest of the taboo for pedagogical ends. The dishevelled woman returns to the roundhouse, reappearing with an iron bucket. The chief restrains her, a struggle ensues and the bucket falls, splashing those nearest – with *water*. The talk then moves to the topic of weapons practice. Those children who have paid their 'gold' are given an opportunity to hold a sword, or to use a slingshot to fire dough balls at a suspended (fake) human head, possibly a reuse of a concept exhibited by earlier renditions of this open-air museum, where a human head was displayed among the reconstructed roundhouses (Mytum 1999, 183). Others have their faces painted with 'woad' – making them feel part of the community.

Other tours can be less dramatic and provide more information about the site, the construction and function of the roundhouses and activities within them, but the guides are always concerned to play their parts in order to sustain the belief of their audience. Mandy, previously a self-employed artist and puppeteer and now an experienced guide, reflected:

> I think it's just being, … fairly deeply into the characters that you are, really, up here. Because the more believable you are as a character, if you're playing with being that character then you're not believable and they're not going to engage with you quite so well. … You can make it entertaining, but I think it's not entertainment, because entertainment, I don't know – I feel that entertainment verges on the 'not real' in a sense, but I personally try to be as real as possible up here, so that they really get to experience it.

This raises a significant issue about potential conflict between different conceptions of authenticity. Mandy is emphasising here an idea of

authenticity of experience over the adoption of some form of archaeologically attested 'truth'. The emphasis here, as in the previous example, is on the guide adopting the persona of an Iron Age person in order to convince the audience. From this perspective, authenticity is a matter of 'believability', that links to but is not simply the same as historical accuracy. In part, this is about the dramatisation of an individual character, who audiences can trust and engage with. Guides seek to enter into the spirit of the living Iron Age village, with its reconstructed houses and their furnishings.

By becoming 'believable' as an Iron Age person, the guide also becomes confident in performing the past. This confidence stems, in part, from an engagement with the physical environment of the open-air museum and the decades of archaeological research that have led to its excavation and reconstructions. However, it moves beyond any possible factual truths, with the aim of engendering truths of a more emotional and experiential kind. These ideas can be interpreted in relation to the categories of 'material', 'experimental' and 'experiential' authenticity that have been defined on the basis of several recent studies (Holtorf 2014; Jin, Xiao and Shen 2020; Karlshoven 2012; Penrose 2020, 1248–9). The material 'realness' of this open-air museum draws both on information obtained from the excavations (of the roundhouses at least) and on its physical location directly on top of the Iron Age site. Efforts to incorporate excavated (or seemingly appropriate) objects and structures in producing stages for performance are entwined with the existential (spontaneous) authenticity of the performance (see Holtorf 2014, 786).

The guides at Castell Henllys recognise that, although entertainment is pedagogically important, this should not compromise their commitment to archaeological evidence and 'truth'. Underlying their performance is background research provided by the archaeological excavations at the site and the cumulative knowledge of the guides that have worked at the site who pass on their approaches to new colleagues. Part of the context (the experiential authenticity) of display at Castell Henllys presumably derives from the history of the training of guides to perform that past at this site.

Guides stress the importance of getting into character and also engage in activities intended to allow visitors to inhabit and embody these pasts. Face-painting is viewed as an opportunity for a more personal dialogue through which the children are introduced to Celtic deities, painted according to the god or goddess most appropriate to each child's character. This interaction has potential to create a powerful memory. Dylan, a young, local guide and the site's resident Roman

legionary, first became interested in history though game-playing. He recalled his own visits to the Castell Henllys as a child:

> [M]y best impression of my school trip from primary school to this, Castell Henllys was when I was painted – my face was painted and I was given Blaidd, the god of wolves. And that's stuck with me. Everything else I've sort of forgotten, but that stuck with me … [Now] I'm the one who sees the deeper meanings in the workers assigning the gods … if you end up with the god Taranis it means you're the noisy kid!

Blaidd is a Welsh word meaning 'wolf', while Taranis was a Gallic god of thunder. Visitors do not simply view enactors' performances of the past – they are actively and corporeally enregistered within them.

At Castell Henllys, the emphasis on storytelling and living history means that relatively little attention is given to the material archaeological information. Many years of excavations produced large quantities of material finds; some are deposited at the National Museum of Wales (Mytum 2013, 43). When questioned about this, some guides commented that there were few finds from the excavation they felt were significant. Mytum notes the challenge of reconciling explicit references to archaeological data of the twenty-first century with the Iron Age role-playing (Mytum 2013, 44). In an attempt to combine the many strands of archaeological data in an engaging format, Mytum developed two, alternative, 'origin myths' for Castell Henllys, which he presented in story form – a 'Celtic militaristic model' and a 'community-building more egalitarian model' (Mytum 2013, 313–20). Although the first-person presentation used at Castell Henllys is limited in terms of the exploitation of archaeological detail, it does allow greater exploration of social aspects of the community. Mytum (2013, 43–4) explains:

> Alternative interpretations of Castell Henllys have also been offered by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, ones where the archaeology has been ignored or even subverted. These have included story-telling sessions, in which the archaeological workers have been explained away as slaves … and where magic and myth form a major component. These are not always successful with the public, when the 'scientific' archaeology was ignored or even apparently contradicted. However, the mind sets revealed by the storyteller may have been closer to past reality than the modern logical structures of cause and effect presented by the

display panels and literature derived from academic archaeological discourse.

Castell Henllys currently lies towards the more 'creative' end of the evidence/education-engagement/entertainment continuum evident at the open-air museums that we visited, although new plans to introduce more of the archaeology were underway at the time of our visit. These include adding greater reference to the ongoing experimental work and a new display of artefacts from the excavations.[1]

The tensions existing in the performances and practices at Castell Henllys are not necessarily uncommon. As noted earlier, in her account of Indianist re-enactors, Petra Karlshoven describes a central tension in their work. Like the guides at Castell Henllys, the re-enactors come from varying personal backgrounds but share a collective aim to: 'strive to become good or better at re-experiencing material worlds from the past through replication' (Karlshoven 2012, 564). This emphasis on experience is associated with an interest in but also an ambivalence to academic rigor and truth. While their performances are informed by evidence, they seek to avoid the 'sterility' they associate with slavish adherence to historical detail and accuracy. At Castell Henllys, we see similar tensions and ambivalences in the way that a focus on experience intersects with the kinds of material evidence and 'truth' that archaeologists unearth.

At Castell Henllys, 'experience' of the past is shaped by a range of actors and interests. The Iron Age is 'performed' by enactors who seek to reconcile the distinct and sometimes contradictory commitments to archaeological evidence with what they term experiential 'believability'. These performances are situated in relation to wider negotiations between many groups of people striving to balance commercial, heritage, research, educational, local and national demands.

In central Scotland, at the Scottish Crannog Centre, a similar though smaller enterprise faces the same issues, but has retained a more evidence-based approach.

'You can't make stuff up!' Engaging with the evidence on Tayside

The Scottish Crannog Centre is owned and operated by the Scottish Trust for Underwater Archaeology (STUA), whose archaeologists have been diving on the crannogs of Loch Tay since 1980 (Barrie and Dixon

2007, 36). Underwater archaeologist Nick Dixon's team located and examined 18 crannogs on Loch Tay and began excavating at Oakbank in 1984. The focal point of this open-air venue was a recreated loch-dwelling, built as an experiment in the 1990s based on excavation results from the 2,500-year-old Oakbank Crannog, located nearby. The centre opened to the public in 1997 and grew to include an exhibition and activity areas where visitors could observe and experience Iron Age crafts, including woodturning, stone-drilling, wool-spinning and fire-lighting.

Much has changed since our visit in September 2017. Shortly after this, the site attained museum status and a new director was appointed. In June 2021, the reconstructed Iron Age crannog – the focus of the site – burned down (Figure 7.1). The following observations and quotations provide a glimpse of the venue as it was in late 2017, before plans emerged for a new, more ambitious Scottish Crannog Centre, which has recently opened (Benson 2024). Our narrative here is presented in the 'ethnographic present' of our fieldwork; however, these observations are based on the visit to a reconstructed crannog that no longer exists.

The site when visited was squeezed into a small area between the road and the loch, largely hidden behind the visitor centre and adjacent woodland. To see the wooden roundhouse and its walkway, visitors needed to pass through the ticket office and museum for a fully guided experience. Once within the venue, they could enjoy a view over the

Figure 7.1 The crannog on Loch Tay. Photographed by Kate Sharpe, 2017. Reproduced with permission of the Scottish Crannog Centre.

crannog and across the loch much as it may have appeared in the past, with only the distant white tower of Kenmore parish church injecting a small, eighteenth-century reminder of the history that has accumulated here since log boats traversed the water.

As at Castell Henllys, visitors are invited to don woollen tunics and shawls. These are primarily intended to keep them warm on the loch, but perhaps also encourage them to enter into the spirit of the visit. The past is not simply something to gaze upon, but literally – and by extension metaphorically – to be clothed within. Suitably clad, groups are led onto the wooden walkway connecting the crannog to the shore, where a costumed guide introduces the site and its context on the loch. This emphasises the close relationship between the reconstructed crannog and the ongoing underwater excavation nearby. Unlike at Castell Henllys, a third-person narrative is used. This approach has a long history at the Scottish Crannog Centre and creates a distance between the Iron Age past and the living experience of visiting the open-air museum. The guide repeatedly references the archaeological evidence and continuing research project, which is largely funded by entrance fees. This financial aspect is stressed by the guide, who acknowledges the contribution of the group through their entrance fee, making them feel part of the process and, perhaps, prompting further donations.

The group is then led into the crannog. This process of crossing the water (akin to crossing the bridge at Castell Henllys), of leaving the present behind and entering the dark interior with its unfamiliar shapes, textures, sounds and smells, seems to be a key part of the visitor 'experience', although it does not appear to be contrived as such (none of the guides referenced this in discussions). As eyes adjust, the guests explore this new world of wood, bracken and wool. Wrapped in blankets and seated on low wooden benches around the central hearth, they perhaps begin to feel a kinship with the family who once occupied the (original) space. In this new reality, the tour guide assumes the role of storyteller, imparting detailed information about the crannog, its inhabitants and Iron Age life on the loch. This presentation is never in character, despite detailed costume and a strong performative element. The interior of the roundhouse is furnished with wooden objects, and replicas of stone and pottery artefacts are distributed around the periphery and hang from the rafters, along with dried plants, as previously observed by Paardekooper (2013, 219). The focus here is on conveying facts and emphasising the authenticity of the crannog interior and accoutrements, drawing upon the excavated archaeological traces of these structures (Barrie and Dixon 2007, 36). There is no deliberate

attempt to transport visitors into the past. Rather, this is a serendipitous side-effect of the choreography of the visit, the physical space and the attention to detail in recreating the evidence. These combine to create a strong sensory experience and intense, communal atmosphere within the crannog.

Although, in discussion, the guides concur that the primary aim of the Scottish Crannog Centre was to educate and inform, they acknowledge that most visitors, who included a range of ages and nationalities, have only a casual interest in archaeology and very little, if any, prior knowledge of the Iron Age. Interactions with visitors are therefore seen as a combination of 'performances' – with costume, props, storytelling and role-play each contributing to varying extents and 'lessons' – with facts, descriptions, demonstrations and explanations used to convey key information. One guide, ex-lecturer Keith, believes that 'experience' helps visitors to better absorb and remember things:

> I think that 50 per cent of this is actually the performance and the way you put it over to the people – and the other 50 per cent is the information, which often they don't retain for very long any way. But they do remember the sort of way it was all presented to them and the interesting things that they saw, the objects that they've seen.

Jim, a straight-talking ex cabbie from Bolton, describes how he relishes interactions with visitors. Beyond his own enjoyment of these performances, he reports feeling that when he uses stories to convey the information his audience is much more engaged:

> I was asked a couple of years ago 'What's it all about?' – the centre – … and I said 'It's about education and entertainment' … We're taking people out on the crannog – you can't just take them out and read them all the facts – you've got to present it in a story-like way, so people will understand what you're talking about. From being on tours at other places I know you've got to make a story out of it. Otherwise, people lose interest.

Julia, previously an opera singer and the newest member of the team, also believes that bare facts are not enough:

> [Y]ou can't make stuff up – it's not a Disney attraction. But I think you have to try and apply it and make it real and relevant … so that

> you can reach across the centuries and almost have a connection with the people that lived here. So, it can't just be a list of 'Things We Discovered'. You have to then apply it … there has to be a tiny bit of artistic licence involved.

In contrast to the dramatised, first-person performance at Castell Henllys, where little reference is made to the archaeology or archaeological artefacts, at the Scottish Crannog Centre the guides draw heavily on all forms of material and environmental information. The nearby excavation of the Oakbank Crannog, together with the ongoing process of reconstructing and maintaining the new crannog, have provided a rich source of material that informs unique, individual presentations. Also, in contrast to Castell Henllys, the visitor centre includes a small site museum that displays some of the artefacts from the excavations and to which the guides refer in their narratives.

Guides aim to generate visitor interest through telling self-consciously 'personal' stories of their individual interest in the site and history. In their 40-minute slots, each guide covers core material but also explores their own particular interests and each weaves a different tale. All focus, to a degree, on the artefacts recovered from the excavation and displayed in the museum, relating them to evidence from environmental remains. A replica wooden butter press, for example, is passed around the group, who are told that analysis has detected butter residue still present. Some guides, however, move beyond a factual presentation, relating objects to contemporary items and issues, emphasising both similarities and differences. For example, Classics graduate and part-time illustrator, Becky, describes the walkway surrounding the roundhouse as a 'balcony' on which the Iron Age family could sit and enjoy 'a breakfast of salmon and scrambled eggs', or 'strawberries and cream'. She also incorporates a partial first-person story into her narrative to explain how the layers of the excavation had built up over time: Her 'Iron Age self' had been snacking on nuts, but she is a messy eater. Nutshells had fallen onto the crannog floor and gradually been trampled through layers of bracken and wool until they fell between the wooden logs forming the base of the crannog. They dropped into the water, eventually settling on the loch bed. Returning to the present, Becky describes the process whereby the detritus of daily life in the Iron Age built up beneath the crannog prior to its eventual collapse over the top. She explains that a fragment of one of her discarded hazelnuts was later retrieved by archaeologists excavating the site.

Other guides highlight the negative aspects of communal life on the crannog – noises, smells and a lack of privacy unpleasant to today's

sensibilities. Ben, a guide who had previously worked hard as a gardener in a stately home, stresses physical hardships relative to modern life – a shorter life span and vulnerability to disease and accidental injuries. Thus, the guides engender relationships between past and present personas. While these stress connections, for instance in the emphasis on common experiences, they also deliberately dwell on difference. The Iron Age past provides a way to reinterpret and reflect on the values and practices of the twenty-first-century present. By the same token, narratives dwell on aspects of this past that seem intriguingly strange to a modern audience.

First-person narrative was not generally employed; the guides recognise that a degree of acting skill is required to either remain in character or to clearly transition between personas. Anne, a long-serving member of the team, recalls creating confusion between her crannog character (an Iron Age farmer's wife) and her modern identity (a twenty-first-century farmer's wife). She also uses role-playing techniques, inviting visitors to think about their own potential contribution to life on the crannog:

> I also ask everybody 'if you were living at this period, how would you contribute to the crannog? Can you make cheese? Have you got the recipe in your head for making beer? Or what time of year do you plant seeds? Are you the planner? Are you the builder? Are you the fisherman?' I just go through the evidence we have – they are collecting raspberries, they are weaving cloth … 'At what point are you going to help here?'
>
> If it's children, I really like it because I can give them roles. I give them jobs to do … 'Could you go and chase the crows out of the barley field' or 'Could you make up a song for after supper' and so on.

Such direct confrontation with the realities of life on the crannog – analogous to the 'fun facts' on the boulders leading to Castell Henllys – prompts visitors to reconsider their own lives and the values of the society in which they live. Through this they are also made to examine their own skills and levels of endurance. These are, indeed, tested when, after their exploration of the crannog, visitors return to the shore of the loch. Following demonstrations of Iron Age skills and crafts by the expert guides, they are encouraged to try their hand, for example making fire, drilling a loom weight, or using the quern. Adults and children alike participate enthusiastically, keen to experience the 'reality' of life in the Iron Age.

Both this centre and Castell Henllys focus their exhibitions, presentations and displays on reconstructions built on or very close to archaeological excavations and both employ costumed guides to deliver information to the public. In other key respects, their approaches are very different. While the first-person 'performance' at Castell Henllys is entertaining, it conveys far less archaeological information than the story-based presentation of the third-person narratives in the crannog. These differences are further reflected in the contrast between the modern, people-based exhibition in Pembrokeshire and the traditional, object and evidence-focused displays in Perthshire. Yet both sites promise to provide visitors with an interactive experience of the past. The Castell Henllys website addresses the unique character of the venue as 'the only place you can walk among Iron Age roundhouses reconstructed on the very spot where they would have stood 2,000 years ago' (Pembrokeshire Coast n.d.). It also explains that these were built with specialist input from archaeologists and that the history of the hillfort is 'brought to life by costumed guides'. For the Crannog Centre, visitors are invited to: 'Walk in the footsteps of the original Crannog dwellers and immerse yourself in village life with original artefacts'. At Castell Henllys there is a deliberate focus on helping visitors to access the past through displayed text, images, the choreography of visitors through the space and the segregation of the hillfort from the twenty-first century. At the Crannog Centre, a similar result is achieved through attention to the archaeology, material and experimental authenticity and imaginative delivery.

Beyond the contrasts between these sites, our analysis points to 'experience' as a way in which past and present are related. Common experiences are conceptualised as a bridge to the past, a way of making it bodily and emotionally present, even as these presentations also emphasise the different social, cultural and technological contexts in which these feelings arise. In both cases, the visitor is engaged through a dialectic of experiential connection and of uncanny difference.

For most prehistoric sites, the personalities evoked by guides require a degree of imagination. There is little evidence for named individuals with unique faces, characteristics, or documented stories, so that guides and enactors must seek to inhabit this space through their own individualised roles and performances. In the following section, we consider how the uniquely preserved excavated information at a Roman heritage centre allows for a different kind of 'personalised' encounter.

Getting personal: the people of Vindolanda

At Castell Henllys and at the Scottish Crannog Centre, displays and performances are informed by the artefacts and structures uncovered by a number of previous professional excavations. At Vindolanda Roman Fort and Museum, however, volunteers are actively involved in excavating on an annual basis, supplementing the work undertaken by resident professional archaeologists. This is an excavation site that has expanded to become a heritage venue, rather than a heritage venue built to promote an archaeological site. The ongoing investigations continue to produce objects from military and civilian life that reveal personal stories and bring individual members of past societies into focus. This is particularly the case for those excavations undertaken in the anaerobic muds, where the preservation of organic materials is remarkably good. The famous wooden writing tablets provide especially revealing insights, with letters home, birthday invitations, business transactions and accounts, children's lessons and doodles – the everyday life of the fort. The museum and guidebook highlight the example of a tablet describing business transactions between Vindolanda and Catterick, which includes the phrase 'the roads are awful'. Andrew Birley notes: 'This is the earliest account of roads in Britain and is an opinion that many still share today' (Birley n.d., 47).

This specificity, with names, dates, families, events and trivia serves to presence the past, reducing the distance between 'us' and 'them'. 'They were just like us' was a common observation among both visitors and volunteers, as we will see. Here, we seek to unpack what is at stake in this common claim. Building on the analysis in previous sections, we highlight how this involves a particular but distinctive articulation of past and present in which ideas of similarity and difference are intricately entwined, but in a qualitatively different way.

For many of the volunteers, the sense of a 'link' materialised most strikingly through proximity to items of material culture intimately connected to the bodies of their wearers. In addition to the written material, many examples of personal objects are displayed in the museum, including a 'wall' of leather sandals (Figure 7.2). These directly reference their individual owners, young and old. Shoes are, of course, evocative items. Items such as these are personalised or made to fit real bodies and are an extension of personality, evidence of taste, of wealth and of vanity. They provoke a sense of kinship in the twenty-first-century visitors who encounter them and in the volunteers who find, wash and record them.

Figure 7.2 The wall of shoes at Vindolanda. Photographed by Kate Sharpe, 2017. Reproduced with permission of the Vindolanda Trust.

Informal interviews recorded with the volunteer community in the summer of 2017 reveal how they were moved and inspired by their encounters with the site and its ancient inhabitants. We begin in the finds hut, with a team including close friends and long-serving Vindolanda volunteers, Lesley and Fiona. Lesley is in her 17th year at the site. A retired teacher, she has developed a keen interest in post-excavation work, specialising in animal bones. She explains how handling the various artefacts brought her closer to the people she studies:

> It's just looking at the whole range of artefacts … the amazing things that come out. Thinking a little bit more about where they have come from, what they were doing there, how they got here, who used them. All the questions about the life of the people who were here … I once found a nit comb and that design hasn't changed over all this time – it is still exactly the same shape, exactly the same purpose! And it's always nice to find the jewellery and wonder who wore it.

She describes how, although often anonymous, the unchanging nature of these domestic items becomes an index of shared experience. In other cases, the connection materialises in more individually specific terms.

Canadian student, Elizabeth, studying Music History, Classics and Environmental Science, found the most exciting part of the excavations to be: 'finding artefacts that really humanise the Romans and let us form a personal connection to them. For example, the other day I was working with [another volunteer] and she found a beautiful glass perfume bottle that was mostly intact'. She also professed a love of ancient jewellery, noting that it had changed little through time:

> I find that it's something that's very easy to have a personal connection because you look at that ancient jewellery and a lot of it looks like modern jewellery. Actually, there is one, which I think was at the Great North Museum in Newcastle and there was a little bracelet which had painted beads and it looked like something from the sixties! So, I took a picture of that and shared it with my family and friends – and I find that that is a really great way to develop a connection.

Duncan is the newest member of the post-excavation team. Now a mature student reading History, he previously had a career in the army. He identified with the Roman soldiers once garrisoned at the fort but, like Lesley, found that it was the more mundane, personal items that really inspired his imagination:

> You can get a real sense of who they were – not just the recorded elite version or the great monuments, you know? It is the little things sometimes … children's shoes getting found and the invitation written on a tablet from the wife of one officer from another one to go and attend a birthday party, you know? Things like this – that makes the past real to me. That provides that link and that's what makes Vindolanda special … Part of the attraction of doing History is trying to put yourself in other people's shoes … trying to look at it from … we want to understand. You can never completely replicate, but you can try and get as close as you can to understanding why they did what they did and why they thought what they thought.

Duncan's narrative, though personally specific, is not untypical. For many, the practice of excavation is driven by more than a desire to increase archaeological understanding. Volunteers value the 'link' that is cultivated through material culture. The thoughts and experiences of these ancient people are understood to be made present through the traces and remains of the things they left behind.

Also on post-excavation duty was Fiona, once a Classics teacher and now a senior research fellow in Social Sciences – and a horse-lover. She lives locally and, like Lesley, had been volunteering for many years. She, too, relished the opportunity to get closer to the past.

> I suppose it's the romance of the thing, isn't it? That connection with the past, being a local and generations, family history and just, you know, that link with people who've lived here, especially as you get older, I think … When I am riding the horse, I think of all of the people who've ridden past before and what it was like – trying to imagine their lives.

She spoke enthusiastically about showing school children some of the finds:

> I was saying … 'You can hold this, and a Roman had his or her hands where you are putting yours', and you could see their faces light up and the kids were really inspired by that as well – the thought that they were standing where the Romans had stood.

Lesley was also moved by some of the more intimate objects passing through the finds shed, especially where they revealed how human nature has remained the same across millennia.

> It's the personal things rather than the particularly valuable things. I think the first year that I came I was really lucky and I found a piece of Samian-ware [Roman pottery] that somebody had scratched their name on. That's always been one of my favourites because it had this person's name and they'd made this deliberate act of marking their name on. And the kids were still quite young and we had a picnic, you know, where we had our names written on the bottom [of the containers] so it's that kind of continuity of 'This is mine!'
>
> And some of the personal jewellery I found is nice because it's a more feminine thing I suppose … It's just amazing, isn't it? To touch something that's lain there for nearly 2000 years, [that] somebody dropped and lost.

For Lesley, the haptic connection creates an intimate and personal connection that makes the temporal and cultural disconnection momentarily insignificant.

The volunteer excavators also expressed a strong sense of the connection with the people whose belongings they recover from the mud.

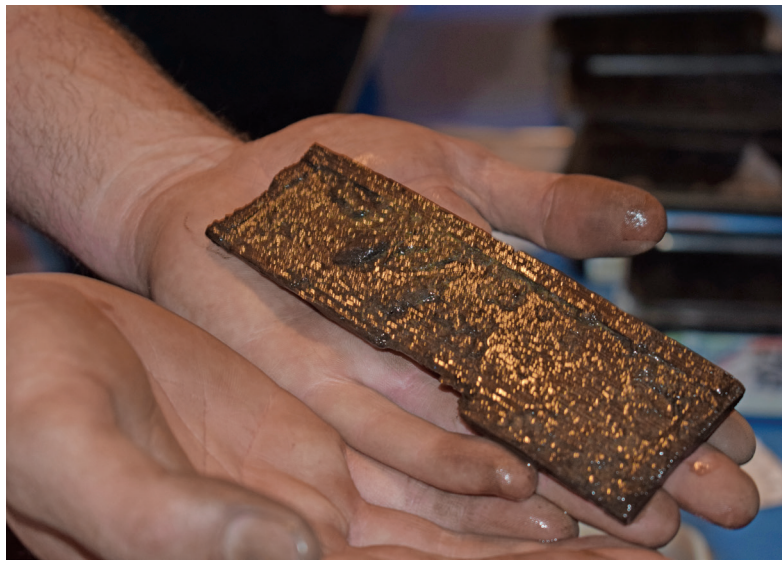

Figure 7.3 Newly recovered writing tablet from Vindolanda. Photographed by Kate Sharpe, 2017. Reproduced with permission of the Vindolanda Trust.

Arriving in north-east England from across the world, they are of all ages and experiences, but are largely well-educated and with a level of knowledge and enthusiasm for the past. Helen and Maureen are medical general practitioners from Shropshire and London respectively, who met at Vindolanda eight years ago and have returned for a reunion every year. Helen reflected on how her ideas had changed as she had become more familiar with the individual people she had previously known collectively as 'the Romans':

> I think I had that stereotypical empire idea and sort of very regimented people – which they were in some ways – but Vindolanda helps you to meet the people underneath it and the ways in which they are both similar and different to ours. So, there was a find a couple of years ago – it was one of these tiles that had been drying in the sun and a dog had walked across, and someone had scratched the word 'Fidelis' in it – 'faithful', 'faithful one'. And yes, you can say 'Oh maybe they scratched that in first and the dog just happened to walk on it and the name was Fidelis', but we all know that someone had a soppy moment nearly 2,000 years ago and thought 'Oh, my dog's walked across there! Oh, I like my dog, Faithful!'

It is the details that seem most affecting. Volunteers find in these quotidian and domestic everyday happenings profound expressions of shared humanity. Others experience this connection in more culturally essentialist terms, tracing social and cultural continuities between past and present. Gabriela explains how one discovery had made her pause and reflect on the community of Vindolanda:

> I came across this big plank and then it kept going on and on … and there was a little chunk of wooden floor and it was almost 2,000 years old! And I kept looking at it, thinking 'Who was the last person who stepped on this? And what was this building?'

Gabriela, who grew up in Spain, has an unusual perspective on the question of whether the Romans were 'just like us':

> The more I learn about the Romans the more I understand [modern] Italians … because when we learn about Romans in Spain, they are pictured as if they were really strict, really severe personalities with no room for fun or for jokes and I think it is totally the opposite. They had a very, very active social life [*laughs*] and it was actually here, when I learned that the *vicus* was probably bigger than the fort at some point … the more I learn about this place, the more I think they were like the Italians that we know now.

In fact, we know from archaeological accounts that many of the 'Romans' who occupied the fort during the early phases were from the Lower Rhine valley rather than from Italy. For Gabriela, however, the site becomes a teleological index of contemporary national characteristics and cultural differences. In Vindolanda, she recognises an explanation and expression of unchanging Italian identity. Others expressed connections between the community of people who occupied the Roman site and the community of volunteers now excavating it.

For many of those who volunteer on the excavations, the point of their involvement is to connect not only to other volunteers, but also to the experiences of the people who once inhabited this site. We have seen how these connections are often understood in individualistic terms. These personalised narratives are also central to the formal representation and display of this material and to the ways in which these Roman pasts are made present to visitors. Volunteer guide Geoff, who regularly escorts groups of visitors around the site, explained how he was

able to use the detailed information from Vindolanda's writing tablets (Figure 7.3) to make his tour more engaging:

> So, you have people's names … In the Roman formulaic sort of dedications, dates could be worked out and so on, but the Vindolanda writing tablets just give us a whole new dimension of that! So, I can say to people, you know, this was the guy who was this and so on – the commanding officer, you quite often get … and I think that helps people to personalise it and because the important thing that we are trying to teach people here is who was here, what they were doing, why they came and what life was like … The key phrase about all of this is actually Mortimer Wheeler's phrase … 'Archaeology is about digging up *people*'. And the important thing is not the buildings or the science … It's not even the DNA or all the rest of the wonderful stuff we can do. It's understanding who the people were, where they came from, what they were doing, what they thought, what their economy was like.

Echoing others, it is in these most specific and individual manifestations of the past, that its most universally 'human' traits are seen to reside. For these volunteers, the human experience is most powerfully located and detected in these personally specific forms.

All the volunteers stressed the value they placed on forming connections to the past. Central to these narratives are ideas about the importance of shared experiences. Beyond its broader epistemic significance, the pursuit of field archaeology is seen as a connection to Roman people through the artefacts they have left. Volunteers highlight the connections that are formed through sharing the same spaces and handling forms of material culture, specifically those with intimate personal associations. Often, connections are seen to reside in shared domestic details and those 'ordinary' practices that are shown to persist in the face of broader social, technological and political change. Though some of these connections are anonymous, volunteers feel particularly intimate links when relationships can be established with specific individuals – a possibility afforded by the unique nature of this site with its high levels of preservation. In all these various ways, physical proximity is understood to facilitate personal and emotional intimacy. Material remains establish a connection that is, as these volunteers describe it, more fundamentally the experience of a common and shared humanity.

Vindolanda offers very different opportunities to those exploited at the open-air museums at Castell Henllys and the Scottish Crannog

Centre. The ongoing excavations bring volunteers from far afield and are very well integrated with the interpretation and display of the site, with the many personal items discovered each season providing regular new insights into the everyday lives of its ancient inhabitants. The tour guide, Geoff, stressed the importance of making the people of the fort and civil settlement come alive for his groups. This is a theme much in evidence at a very different set of Roman remains – the spa and temple complex of Aquae Sulis in Bath.

Meeting the ancestors in Aquae Sulis

At the Roman Baths, in the city of Bath (Roman Aquae Sulis; Bath & North East Somerset Council), the museum designers and curators have woven a narrative around individual characters identified from the artefacts recovered from the site. These inhabitants of Aquae Sulis are introduced through the evidence and a series of performance videos set in CGI environments (IsoDesign n.d.). The recurring characters were filmed acting out a series of storylines around the activities and objects in the museum. Actors were shot in a large green-screen studio and then dropped back into a CGI model, rendered to appear as naturalistic as possible. Their stories are threaded throughout the galleries as they engage in activities and move around the site, both individually and together, and they can also be found in various forms on the museum's website.

The first character encountered by visitors is a lady with a striking hairstyle. She is based on a carved stone head from a tomb, which is displayed in the museum. She is shown, with her attendant, in several animations. Another film shows a priestly figure who appears to berate a mason engaged in carving an inscription. Further examination of the gallery reveals the stone in question, found in 1965 beneath the Grand Pump Room of the Roman complex. The inscription reads 'DEAE SVLI L MARCIVS MEMOR HARVSP DD', which translates as 'To the goddess Suli [Sulis], Lucius Marcus, a grateful Haruspex, donated out of his devotion'. The identity of the priest becomes clearer – a haruspex who predicted the future by, for example, examining the guts of animals. The inscription appears to have been edited. Scholars have suggested that whoever carved the stone made a few errors, originally missing the 'O' from 'MEMOR' and having to squeeze the letters 'VSP' after the abbreviation 'HAR'. Both the haruspex and the incompetent mason appear in other performance videos along with the lady.

One animation, in particular, aims to situate visitors directly among the citizens of Aquae Sulis and can also be viewed on the Roman Baths website and associated YouTube channel (Roman Baths 2013). The clip begins with an image of the Temple Courtyard as it is presented today, with walkways suspended above the remains and a visitor peering over the railing. The modern walls then become replaced by drawn lines, which gradually grow into a reconstructed view of the Roman architecture, as the walkways and the visitor fade. We now see the courtyard populated by our various characters as they pursue their daily lives. This clever use of graphics to transport visitors through time is a valuable aid to those trying to make sense of the array of stones beneath them, transforming the space while they stand in the centre of it.

Another imaginative use of digital technology is found in the East Baths. Life-sized videos of citizens and slaves engaged in changing clothes and enjoying massages are projected, ghost-like over the remains (Roman Baths 2017). These faint traces of the past, like memories held by the stones, bring these otherwise inert and (perhaps) less interesting spaces to life and allow visitors to become voyeurs of the past. A further way in which the designers have sought to animate the Roman remains is through a scaled, 3D tabletop model of the Baths complex. Dozens of motion-captured figures were animated, and the video was mapped to accurately populate the model, bringing the miniature reconstruction to life.

The emphasis on meeting Roman people at Bath is further manifested in the presence of 'real', role-playing characters who, like the Iron Age inhabitants of Castell Henllys, fully inhabit their environment. They engage in conversation with visitors who can now come face to face with the fashionable lady (Flavia) and her slave girl (Apulia), the pair of incompetent masons (Sulinus and Brucetus) and the haruspex (Gaius Calpernius Receptus). However, unlike the guides in the hillfort who explicitly engage with and address the present, these citizens of Aquae Sulis do not 'perform' but rather go about their business as though oblivious to the fact that two millennia have passed and the baths are in ruins around them. As with the digital projections, they are like ghosts, stuck in time, unable to leave. They chat naturally to the public, taking them to be pilgrims who have journeyed from afar to visit the religious spa. Here, again, visitors are drawn directly into the past, playing a role in impromptu improvisations. A conversation initiated by Kate Sharpe with one lady selling soap to would-be bathers revealed that she and her husband had come to Aquae Sulis in search of a cure for his various ailments. He had since died, but she remained, earning a living with a

boarding house for pilgrims and making and selling her wares at the baths.

Such encounters with people from the past leave an impression. Holtorf notes that 'the conversations that visitors had with contemporary time travellers posing as ancient inhabitants are the most memorable part of any visit' (Holtorf 2014, 792; see also Svendsen 2010). The combination of real names, personal objects and access to the spaces inhabited by the people who owned them is powerful. By creating a narrative around those people and allowing visitors to encounter them in 'real life', the museum has achieved an extraordinary temporal shift. But have these characters moved into our time, or are we back in theirs?

Conclusion: experiences of the past

Traditional, 'authorised' heritage has often portrayed the past as an inert entity focusing upon tangible relics such as artefacts and structures, apart from our everyday lives – something to be studied, interpreted, visited and appreciated. This is no longer the case. Open-air museums rarely rely on such an approach today. Instead, the continuum separating past and present has become more flexible. In this chapter we have shown how a complex set of techniques, technologies, material cultures and places are assembled in order to enact 'experiences' of the past. In this way our account has highlighted the range of ways in which experience is made to mean and (literally) matter as an object of heritage interest. At the various Iron Age and Roman contexts explored, we have highlighted how these constellations of practice are associated with specific ways of relating past and present. The venues referenced encourage visitors to engage with history in different ways – through 'time travel', discovery (at Vindolanda), empathy and active participation.

This chapter has presented a series of interactions between people and places. We have seen how 'experience' of the past is centred in similar and different ways across the sites visited and explored a variety of ways in which imagination and creativity are projected into interpretive and evidential gaps. At Castell Henllys and Aquae Sulis, visitors enter archaeologically 'real' spaces inhabited by characters who present themselves from within their own time – either conscious of their place in the timeline (at Castell Henllys) or unaware (at Bath). At Aquae Sulis, digital technology provides windows onto the past, while named historical individuals inhabit ('haunt'?) the space, offering direct communication with real past people.

In Chapter 6, we saw how connections through time were made via particular places. Chapter 7 reveals how direct experience and engagement are used to enhance these connections. This may be through physical activities – sitting in a crannog, wearing a shawl, uncovering and handling artefacts, crafting or cooking. It may also be through social and emotional provocations – talking with and even becoming part of the community or reflecting on similarities and differences between past and present.

The Iron Age and Roman periods present distinctive challenges to heritage managers. Roman culture is frequently referenced and presented in contemporary media and is perceived by some people as more fully comparable to modern life (above). Visitors to Roman heritage venues are, therefore, more familiar with the narratives and the evidence, and they arrive loaded with expectations and assumptions that may need to be challenged. Yet the relatively detailed archaeological understanding of Roman life in Britain, with its documented events and individuals and its variety of standing remains, provides an arena for more personal encounters and experiences. In contrast, the Iron Age is a less accessible place in time and space, with only earthen banks and ditches, ruined stone houses and drowned crannogs marking the homes of its largely anonymous people. It also covers a much greater timespan than the 400 years of Roman Britain.

In a discussion of the reception of literary texts, Wolfgang Iser (1980, 111) notes that good texts leave creative space for the reader's imagination:

> [The reader] is drawn into the events and made to supply what is meant from what is not said. What is said only appears to take on significance as a reference to what is not said; it is the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning. But as the unsaid comes to life in the reader's imagination, so the said 'expands' to take on greater significance than might have been supposed; even trivial scenes can seem surprisingly profound … Communication in literature … is a process set in motion and regulated … by a mutually restrictive and magnifying interaction between the explicit and the implicit, between revelation and concealment. What is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed.

Iser highlights how there can be an inverse relationship between knowledge and imagination – the less we know, the more we have space

to imagine. Inspired by this insight we have shown how different sites stage the past in ways that make this trade off in different ways, posing questions or highlighting gaps as opposed to trying to provide answers or interpretations that fill the 'unknowns'.

Appreciating the past involves many interconnecting forms, spaces and experiences. The outdoor heritage centres – and some museums – provide arenas in which diverse forms of knowledge are assembled, reworked and presented. These include the evidence of past and present excavations and experimental studies, the experience of practical skills, the rubrics of heritage management, and expertise in teaching, communication and performance. Academically derived information and theories are processed and enmeshed with less authorised, more direct and more physical sources and are also shaped by external forces, including changing national curricula, financial bottom-lines, management upheavals, influential legacies, organisational branding and operations, new trends and technologies and, not least, the fluctuating concerns, values and priorities of the contemporary world.

As is evident from our research, many of the practitioners at heritage venues do not have formal training in archaeology or history, but instead possess a wealth of knowledge and skills and a passion to communicate these to visitors and school children. The individuals interviewed during this project draw on previous careers ranging from teaching, forestry, farming, art and, in one case, opera singing, but have built up a collective set of approaches, ranging from business management, marketing and promotion and events management to education, community work, museum curation and interpretation. In addition, they have developed expertise in storytelling and costume making; farming (animals and crops); the construction and maintenance of ancient architecture; fire-making; wood, metal, stone and cloth working; ancient food and medicine; tools and weaponry; and the building of giant wicker figures! The paid staff are complemented by a significant number of volunteers who have equally diverse backgrounds and who contribute many hours to building and maintaining the sites, excavating, giving tours and talking to visitors and demonstrating crafts. Each member of the team brings a unique perspective and character to the process of recreating and presenting the past, moulding the evidence in distinctive ways to present new stories about the past.

Our research has shown the degree to which site interpretation builds on the past history of places, while display and interpretation regimes change. The materiality of places – their buildings, passages

and spaces – provides an anchor for the stories that circulate around them (see Cresswell and Hoskins 2008). The process of translating the archaeological evidence into an engaging and informative narrative is not solely related to the stated objectives of the heritage centre, to training, or to logistical (including financial) restraints. The personal experiences, knowledge, preferences and personalities of the staff are also significant in shaping the visitor experience and in extrapolating beyond the material evidence.

Note

1 Harold Mytum, personal communication, September 2019.

8
Conclusion: imagining future pasts

Richard Hingley, Thomas Yarrow and Kate Sharpe

The previous seven chapters suggest that dualities will continue to proliferate in the communication and performance of ancient identities. The best option is to seek to inform and modify how these ideas are developed and communicated and to think in more detail about how such concepts and the materials upon which they draw operate. This process is not simple to enact, since insistent dualities characterise how the pre-Roman past is separated from the Roman period but also, often, the ideas used to define each period.

The predictability of the past

We began the *Ancient Identities* project with the idea that the insistent dualities that permeate the field of Iron Age and Roman heritages needed to be assessed critically and, perhaps, replaced (Hingley, Bonacchi and Sharpe 2018). Part I of this monograph reflects this critical focus, although this research has taken a more flexible approach, steering away from an overly critical perspective. We soon realised when we started to research the available materials that the ideas (myths?) that lie at the heart of the engagements between the peoples of Britain and those from other parts of the Roman empire are so firmly established that anyone aiming to replace them would be unlikely to progress very far. The ancient monuments available for the public to visit are (mainly) a concrete reflection of fashions of research at the start of the last century, symbolising the most monumental and substantial traces of the Roman period, the forts and villas. They also reflect an old tradition of focusing on the defensive architecture of an (apparently) unsettled Iron Age

that has been substantially challenged since the 1970s by an emphasis on egalitarian living and sustainable agriculture and diet. An approach that aims to discard insistent dualities might result in a vacuum since archaeology can never be entirely descriptive if the aim is to sell the past to the public or to keep the academic subject sustainable. We need changing interpretations to keep our subject alive.

Popular TV programmes that address archaeological topics, including *Time Team* and *Digging for Britain*, tend to emphasise discoveries. Although this serves a significant role in informing people, media coverage of archaeology rarely seems to consider the changing nature of interpretations and theories about the past or the contested nature of ideas. High-profile archaeological finds publicised in the media are usually monumental and high-status, such as the new Roman villas and mosaics regularly found across southern Britain. These draw public attention and reinforce the view that knowledge of this period is established and secure.

There is an inconsistency here. Archaeologists tend to consider that many of the 'public' view the Roman past as well-known, relatively fully understood and uncontentious – perhaps reflected by the impressive monumental remains and abundant artefacts (Mills 2013, 2). This confidence about how to interpret Roman Britain may be one of the reasons for the negative responses of some commentators on social media to the idea that people deriving from Africa lived in Britain in Roman times (Beard 2016; Hingley 2021b). Archaeologists often argue for a need to transform their approaches, theories and source materials, to reflect a different approach to the past based on questioning current understanding (see Millett, Revell and Moore 2016; Moore and Armada 2011). We should not see the 'public' as a single group, however, and it remains true that we do not fully understand the diversity of ways in which people across Britain interpret the Roman or the Iron Age past.

A substantial ethnographic survey of diverse groups would be required to assess this issue (Hingley 2015). In Chapter 5, we argued that the definition of rules and standards for archaeology in the guidance documents for NLHF-funded projects have helped to hold back innovation by emphasising 'facts' and the role of experts (Cole 2015, 128). Heritage approaches help archaeologists work in a more broadly defined and inclusive way – drawing on memories of people and their emotional responses to material culture (Cole 2015, 116). In other words, representations of the past can be socially useful even if they are not factually 'true' from an archaeological perspective. And though these uses can sometimes be problematic, they are not necessarily so. We have shown

how engagements with Iron Age and Roman pasts can help people reflect and reimagine themselves in the present in different ways.

The prominence of the Iron Age and Roman pasts in Britain

Our case studies have helped to document some of the various and diverse manifestations of Iron Age and Roman heritage used to document and communicate the past and how these have been used to imagine identities, create social relationships and provide entertainment. At the heart of our research is the focus on why the Iron Age and Roman periods appeal to certain individuals and communities.

We have noted the reconstruction of later prehistoric buildings, mostly roundhouses, on at least 65 sites across the UK and the current fashion for constructing Iron Age-inspired roundhouses as dwellings (Chapter 3). Several prominent open-air museums still focus considerable attention on the Iron Age. The accidental burning down of the reconstructed roundhouse at the Scottish Crannog Centre in 2021 has resulted in an ambitious and larger-scale new development, with a 'village' of roundhouses and the plan to reconstruct a new crannog in Loch Tay (Benson 2024; Scottish Crannog Centre n.d.).

The high-profile Roman monuments across England – including the Roman Baths at Bath, the military sites along Hadrian's Wall, Fishbourne Roman Palace and Chedworth Roman Villa – draw many visitors and provide local employment. All these Iron Age and Roman venues form popular places for school parties to reinforce the learning of British history. The image of the Roman legionary soldier is very prominent in Britain, mainly because of the re-enactors who play significant roles in media coverage of the Roman past and attract the public to open-air museums (Chapter 4). The British Museum *Legion* exhibition – on show as this conclusion is being written – is proving very popular with the public.

Iron Age dualities

A significant aspect of the interpretations of the Iron Age for the public focuses upon the old tradition of pre-Roman peoples as unsettled and warring. This idea derived from a nineteenth-century focus on the defended sites of the Iron Age (the hillforts and *oppida*) and the metal

weapons that formed impressive early finds. It also fed on the influential writings of classical authors, including the works of Julius Caesar and Tacitus, that emphasised the warring nature of Iron Age peoples. We have seen that, from the 1940s, there was a reaction to the idea of an unsettled Iron Age as the density of settlement and the significance of a mixed agricultural economy came to be recognised. Nevertheless, the image of Iron Age warriors remains a powerful symbol. The materials on BBC Bitesize for school children only recently changed from emphasising the unsettled nature of the Iron Age to a focus on community living and sustainability (see Chapter 1).

Archaeologists have argued for the importance of educating the public about later prehistory since at least 1944, when the TV programme *The Beginning of History* featured prehistoric monuments across Britain and, significantly, a reconstructed roundhouse. We have explored how several high-profile open-air museums communicate the Iron Age as a period of a simpler, more egalitarian and sustainable life than the present. Several of these venues originated with the reconstruction of Iron Age buildings, drawing inspiration from Peter Reynolds' research at Butser Ancient Farm and the BBC TV programme *Living in the Past*. Many of these open-air museums have developed to feature several periods of the ancient past. These venues assist schoolteachers who educate pupils to understand the sequence of our history. The idea of the Iron Age as (relatively) egalitarian and sustainable has helped bring this formerly neglected period more directly into engagement with the public, especially at schools. The work of Reynolds and his colleagues in the experimental reconstruction of roundhouses fitted with this agenda and helped archaeologists influence the authorities to include prehistory in the latest *National Curriculum in England* (Department for Education 2014).

The emphasis on Iron Age living has deeply impacted upon the open-air museums, leading to an overemphasis on the idea of the Iron Age as peaceful and mundane. Some open-air museums have addressed this through gentle exploration of interpretations of past religious and ritual beliefs, as we have seen at Castell Henllys. There is a problem, however, in exploring the idea of pagan beliefs too directly since the archaeological critique of contemporary druids has influenced heritage and educational venues. This concern is also clearly demonstrated by the absence of references to druids and pagans in community projects funded by the NLHF (Chapter 5). On the other hand, two eco-centres in Wales draw on roundhouse architecture while presenting a spiritual and ecological message that draws upon a romanticised concept of a Celtic past.

It is significant that the focus on the Iron Age as egalitarian and sustainable partly reflects the emphasis of archaeological research during the past 50 years. The work of Bersu, Cunliffe, Reynolds and others aimed to counter the emphasis in the mid-twentieth century on the Iron Age as an unstable time when warring and violence were common. This picture, which derived from the writings of classical authors, came to be viewed as directly ideological. It is remarkable today to view the considerable impact caused by the idea of reconstructing roundhouses across Britain. It is important to maintain a balance in accounting for the later prehistoric past, however, since we know that many Iron Age individuals and communities were exposed to considerable violence. We know this from the damage observed on the bones of buried people, and research has turned more directly in the past decades to exploring violence in the ancient past (King 2013).

It is also important to recognise that Iron Age (and Roman) people will have lived their lives in a spiritual universe, even though it is difficult for archaeologists to explain the character of these beliefs to the public. Our case studies in Part II illustrate that some open-air museums address these issues in communicating the past to school pupils and adults. The growing focus on living history at these venues has led to new opportunities to engage visitors with nuanced versions of living in the Iron Age, including ideas that may not fully appeal to those archaeologists who prefer a more evidentially based approach to interpretation.

Roman dualities

When this research commenced, we thought the 'Romans' had a mainly positive image with the public, at least across much of England (see Hingley 2015). Attitudes in Scotland, Wales and Cornwall are often more critical of the Romans because of the differing histories and origin myths in these parts of the UK. We suspected that people assumed that Roman Britain was well-understood and predictable, reflecting the educational focus and the emphasis in media coverage of the Roman period as well-known and uncontroversial. Archaeologists who focus on the Roman period can do more to challenge the assumption that the Roman past is well-known and predictable.

The Roman past has long been tied into an origin myth in the south, focusing on the idea that the conquest enabled the introduction of 'civilisation' across much of England, with the establishment of local towns, public order and gracious living (bathhouses, dining,

glamourous clothes, etc.). Civil life across the south included wealthy landowners who ruled local communities from the *civitas* capitals and lived in elaborate houses. The villas available for the public to visit and the walled circuits and public buildings of Roman towns all reflect this view. The use of this approach to attract the public to ancient monuments and museums relates closely to the popular educational idea of 'What the Romans did for us' (explored in Chapter 1). These Roman venues now include the remarkable reconstruction of the Villa Ventorum at the Newt (Somerset). This lavish reconstruction and on-site museum fit well with this perspective, emphasising the material aspects of elite living within the grounds of a private club. Like many Roman buildings displayed as ancient monuments, the emphasis at Villa Ventorum is on the visibility of impressive aspects of Roman culture, such as mosaics and monumental architecture. These are archaeological features that people have been educated to appreciate for generations. The idea of elite civil living draws upon concepts of architecture and civic life that have been influential since the Renaissance. These conceptions focus on ideas of gentlemen and ladies, landed wealth and classical education.

Across northern England and northern Wales, in the frontier regions, soldiers stationed at forts and fortresses are seen traditionally to have protected the flourishing of civil life in the south. The image of the legionary re-enactor dominates the public image of these military landscapes. Archaeologists, heritage interpreters and re-enactors have worked hard over the past decades to broaden ideas of the Roman military with the public by exploring the auxiliary soldiers and the communities established at Roman forts and fortresses (Chapter 4) – but the image of the legionary remains dominant. Searching on Google Images for the term 'Roman soldiers' produces many legionaries and rather few auxiliary soldiers.

The British Museum built on this popularity with their exhibition *Legion: Life in the Roman Army* in 2024. Despite the title, this exhibition addressed many aspects of the Roman military as a community, including considering the downside of Roman military life. *Legion* would seem, however, to have projected a rather positive view of life in the Roman military. Thomas Jones (2024) suggests this exhibition acted as a 'subliminal recruitment drive' for the British military. Like Roman military re-enactment, *Legion* focused on a positive expression of the ancient past but with negative nuances. The idea of the Roman legionary soldier appeals to a conception of stability, order and rigid gender hierarchies and has a high international currency. It draws upon over half a century of legionary re-enactment performances and the media

coverage suggests that the British Museum exhibition has been popular with teenagers.

This comfortable view of Roman Britain – characterised by the country gentry living in villas in the south and governing from towns and the high-status legionary soldiers living on the frontiers – developed in the context of the positive attitudes to imperialism that dominated until the 1960s and 1970s (Hingley 2000). We believe that this may remain a strong belief about the Roman past in the minds of many of the public in England, perhaps in some cases partly drawing upon a nostalgic attitude to the British empire (Bonacchi 2022, 98). Indeed, this focus on elite living and stability is communicated through the teaching about the Roman past in the English national curriculum (Hingley, Bonacchi and Sharpe 2018).

The same concepts have traditionally formed the focus of interpretation at Roman-period ancient monuments and museums across Britain. In Scotland, however, the perceived identity of the Romans as violent invaders and colonists has created some rather more critical interpretations, explaining partly why an inventive approach has been taken by the recent 'Rediscovering the Antonine Wall' project (Chapter 5). Some museums have also started, however, to complicate their interpretations of the Roman past by telling more nuanced tales (Chapter 2).

Vindolanda is informative from this perspective, since the discoveries at this long-lived fort communicate directly with excavation volunteers and visitors (Chapter 7). The immediacy of discovery and the materiality of artefacts such as sandals and the 'letters' enable glimpses of the everyday life of named auxiliary soldiers and other individuals, including women, children and common soldiers, as well as commanding officers and senior officials. This communicates a very different story of the Roman past from many other venues, and may partly explain the continuing attraction of this site to visitors. Evidence relating to the Roman period across England and Wales is diverse, specific and often personal, providing a rich source of ideas about the variable identities of the peoples of Roman Britain, involving issues of gender, race and status (Hingley 2021a). We have seen, for example, that the Corinium Museum has explored the lives of the everyday inhabitants of the *civitas* capital, to counter the domination of the displays by the impressive mosaic floors and elite material culture. At the Tullie House Museum in Carlisle, the Frontiers Gallery raises parallels between Hadrian's Wall and modern borderworks, causing many visitors to pause and reflect (Mills 2021).

One aspect of this broadening out from an over-specific focus on Roman elite culture relates to concerns about increasing social inequalities

in Britain and the context of the increasing climate catastrophe. These problems may drive many to look at the Romans more critically. The drawing of a comparison between the Roman empire and the European Union – which reflected upon dictatorial government and migration – emerged from an analysis of attitudes expressed on social media by supporters of Brexit in the run-up to the referendum of 2016 (Bonacchi 2022, 78–107). Concerns about the Roman past as a period characterised by large-scale development, increased inequality and environmental damage appear, at least in part, to explain the growing prominence at open-air museums of prehistory and the early medieval past.

The material and the mental

One issue is that displays in museums can be updated only occasionally. As academic interpretations change, the displays provided for the public can only be revised and altered after a passage of time. Polm criticised the Museum of London's Roman displays as elitist and Romanocentric in 2016, although these were installed nine years earlier. Academic agendas were changing in the meantime, with Mattingly's ground-breaking work, *An Imperial Possession*, published in 2006. The curators who developed the display at the Museum of London will not have had time to consult Mattingly's book – or the other significant new directions of the study of Roman Britain that emerged in the decade after the installation of these Roman displays that informed Polm's critique. To make this point does not make Polm's criticisms irrelevant. We do need to accept, however, that museum displays will always exhibit a time lag in communicating new perspectives. The London Museum is moving to a new home, and substantial work is underway to update and revise the exhibitions of all periods of the city's past.[1]

Living history presentations at open-air museums can react more directly to changing ideas and inspirations. Even at these venues, it is not possible to update the displays on a regular basis. This time lag does mean that there is time for new evidence to be analysed and for novel interpretations to be assessed before they are presented. It is necessary to replace timber and earth roundhouses after a few decades when they become unsafe, even when these buildings are well maintained (Mytum and Meek 2020). The replacement buildings can incorporate new knowledge and discoveries. Substantial Roman-period reconstructions, such as the townhouse at Wroxeter, have a far longer lifespan. Presumably, the substantial reconstruction at Villa Ventorum will not

need rebuilding for many decades, setting a particular view of the Roman past in stone.

Our research has explored the degree to which site display and interpretation build on the materiality and the history of places while display and interpretation regimes change. The physicality of places, buildings, passages and spaces, provides an anchor for the stories that circulate around them. We have observed that the process of translating the archaeological evidence into an engaging and informative narrative is not solely related to the stated objectives of the heritage centre, to training, or logistical (including financial) restraints. Rather, the personal experiences, knowledge, preferences and personalities of the staff are also significant in shaping the visitor experience and in extrapolating beyond the material evidence. We have adopted and developed the concept of experiential authenticity to provide a framework for these performances.

The Iron Age may seem more attractive to some than the Roman past. For later prehistory, it is easy to explain to people that our knowledge is limited. As we have seen, Wolfgang Iser (1980, 111) highlights how there can be an inverse relationship between knowledge and imagination – the less we know, the more we have space to imagine. The gaps available in interpretations of the Iron Age offer opportunities for innovation, as in the living history performances at Castell Henllys. Many ideas about life in the Iron Age stem back to early roots in the classical texts and the ways that these were adopted in the romanticism of ideas about the pre-Roman peoples (Hingley 2011). The Iron Age may seem attractive to people concerned about growing social inequality and wealth disparities as a model of relative egalitarian living. These concerns must help to explain the popularity of community projects funded by the NLHF that stress communal living and sustainability since teachers have a mandate to encourage pupils to be tolerant of others.

The future

Another issue that is relevant here is the value of ancient places and museums that focus on the interface between the Iron Age and Roman periods. We have seen that insistent dualities tend to drive interpretations of these two periods apart, with ideas about the Iron Age working as a source for contrasting certain aspects of the Roman past and vice versa. Archaeologists have focused research on the continuities – in addition to the changes – between these two periods. Yet, interpretations

for the public often drive understandings of these periods apart. Sites like Chysauster and Castell Henllys are relevant here, as Iron Age-style settlements occupied during the Roman period. At Butser Ancient Farm we have seen that the interpreters seek to exploit the interface between the two periods. The Corinium Museum and the Verulamium Museum address the transition from the Iron Age to the Roman period at their eponymous *oppida*/towns. One future issue for heritage interpretation is how to build interpretations of the connections between the Iron Age and the Roman period.

How might the image of the Roman military be transformed further? Efforts are underway to explore the diverse geographical and ethnic origins of Roman soldiers and their less civilised habits, as the British Museum *Legion* exhibition indicated. One significant issue is that this military identity concept overlaps with ideas about civil life in the southern areas of Roman Britain, as indicated by the uses made of Roman legionary re-enactors to attract the public to ancient monuments and open-air museums (Chapter 4). Members of the Roman military visited and probably retired to places in the south of the province, but Roman civil life is not usually directly addressed by the re-enactment groups across Britain. The camp followers associated with the military re-enactment groups do not aim to portray life in towns or villas. Perhaps some re-enactment groups could address civil life more fully, including the less wealthy families in town and country, to give a more balanced view of life in the Roman past. Such presentations might help to make the Roman past across southern Britain more appealing to a wider audience.

Community projects are tightly controlled by guidelines that emphasise archaeology as a closely defined and limited field of study. It has been possible for community groups to create slightly more creative projects to address the Iron Age past (Chapter 5). In contrast, Roman projects have tended to address uncovering and managing archaeological sites and acquiring objects for public display. These projects have enabled public access to a greater range of sites and archaeological finds, including the Ilam Pan and the finds from Hallaton. Archaeology can be defined in a broader context, however, and a driver of future archaeological research should be to help the public follow changes in our understanding of the past. Discoveries of archaeological sites and objects help transform knowledge, but updated ideas also need to be communicated as interpretations are reviewed and refreshed. Perhaps a community group along the lines of Hadrian's Wall or the Antonine Wall could work with a Roman re-enactment group to address the issue of the ethnic diversity of Roman legionary and auxiliary soldiers more directly.

Or maybe one of the open-air museums might seek to reconstruct further examples of lower-status Roman-period houses (to add to the examples at Butser and the shop at Wroxeter) in the southern part of the province to illustrate a less elite aspect of civil Roman Britain. The Corinium Museum includes a partial reconstruction of one of the strip houses once so common in Roman towns. Why not reconstruct one of these buildings along with peopling it with re-enactors to represent its occupants in London or Bath?

These ideas are offered positively, since judging the value of the things we draw from the ancient past is not (entirely) the point of this research. The growing focus on experience and experiential authenticity that appears to have taken over, at least to a degree, from previous ideas of material authenticity supports this point. However, the correct dress and equipment remain vitally significant to many Roman re-enactors, reflecting an archaeological conception of the importance of 'facts'. One key aspect, explored with community projects, is to ensure that ideas are constantly transforming to reflect changes in academic focus and public appreciation. The actions of living history practitioners in the material environments of open-air museums (and their reconstructed buildings) are a focal aspect of Part II. This focus on places and place-making addressed in this book could form the subject for further ethnographic research to explore the actions of all the groups that draw upon the Iron Age and Roman pasts.

Final words

We see the structuring duality behind our research topic most consistently in the persisting notion that the Roman past is more familiar and accessible than the Iron Age past. This is partly a matter of perceived cultural familiarity that rests on the origin myth of the 'Romans' as 'civilised' people with technologies and customs that are more 'like us'. In turn, this is partly a matter of the excavated archaeological 'evidence' and the more individualised accounts that this can interpretively sustain.

But beyond this duality, both these pasts have an imaginative appeal that is, in some way, about the uncanny. Individuals recognise themselves in these ancient people and these histories (both are said on occasion to be 'just like us') and look to them as origin myths and antecedents to confirm their sense of who they are. At the same time, the strangeness of these pasts is also part of their appeal. Even though this 'difference' is always a curated one, it provides opportunities to

reflect on who we are, and to comprehend the peculiarity of the modern world.

Our account highlights how these dualities structure – without determining – contemporary social practice in a range of specific ways. While these reflect longer-term and broader dualities, we have drawn attention to the way that both pasts are increasingly accessed not only as representation or knowledge but as 'experience'.

Note

1 Rebecca Redfern, personal communication, April 2024.

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How are ideas about Iron Age and Roman pasts relevant to people in contemporary Britain? And how do the interests and ideologies of our own society shape the way we present, curate and understand these histories? This book is the first detailed study to explore these questions. It addresses how Iron Age and Roman heritage in Britain is conceived and understood today and sheds new light on the continued social significance of these ancient histories.

Ancient Identities in Britain investigates how ideas about the Iron Age and Roman past remain socially relevant: how they are studied in UK classrooms and presented in the media, and how they are projected by ancient monuments, open-air museums, re-enactments, living history exhibits and community projects across England, Scotland and Wales. Adding to this survey, fieldwork and interviews at five heritage venues, including Vindolanda, Castell Henllys and Butser Ancient Farm, reveal the principles and motivations of professional staff and different styles of presentation for the public. An engaging and nuanced account of everyday practices, this study sheds new light on the processes through which heritage has been made. Throughout, *Ancient Identities in Britain* explores the actions, ideas and material conditions through which these periods become, and have become, heritage in the present, and investigates how contemporary social practices are transformed through encounters with material traces and conceptual legacies.

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